

## Chapter 1

"Where is she?" Harry was bouncing up and down on his feet, staring up and down the street. Hermione stood to one side, watching him with a smile on her face. He turned and looked at her "What?"

"Oh - nothing" She replied innocently. When he glared at her, she smiled cheekily and turned back to the road.

"Hermione" He whined, then - when she ignored him - he added "Minnie!"

"What did I tell you about calling me that?" She said, whirling round to face him.

"That he should do it all the time, and that he should tell everyone he knows and get them to call you it as well?" A voice came from behind them. They turned, and saw Sally stood there, next to her mother Susan "So - why are you two fighting?"

"We weren't" Harry smiled, then frowned when Hermione snorted in amusement.

"Hermione? Do you have something to add?"

"We should get inside" Hermione replied, avoiding Sally's question "We really shouldn't stand out on the street for long"

"Okay" Harry said "Just let me get my Uncle" He turned, and as Sally and Susan watched, he walked away, and vanished. A moment later, Sally and Susan turned to Hermione, looking confused.

"Wasn't Harry supposed to meet us here?" Susan asked, then took a step back when Hermione started giggling "What?"

"I will explain when Harry and Michael come back" The young girl replied, still smiling. Sally and Susan stared at her for a moment, then nodded.

A few minutes later, Susan and Sally jumped in surprise as Harry and Michael appeared in front of them. Hermione watched them

carefully, and smiled as a look of understanding came over their faces.

"Susan, Sally - you are stood in front of The White House, home to Michael and Harry" Sirius said quietly enough so that only the two of them would hear. A few seconds later, the two visitors gasped as the houses in front of them sprung apart, and a new one appeared in between them "Ladies, Harry - shall we go?"

"So - that isn't a normal fidelius charm is it?" Susan asked Michael. Harry had taken Sally upstairs to her room, while the other three were sitting in the lounge, talking.

"No. It is a variation that Lily created for when she..." Sirius trailed off, then continued "It has two extra things above the normal charm. The first is that I am the only one who can reveal the secret"

"Isn't that normal?" Sally asked.

"It also covers non-voluntary methods" Hermione replied "So veritaserum, legilimency - any method that could be used to force the secret from you also won't work" She smiled at Sirius "Sorry Michael - you were saying?"

"I wanted to prevent random bad guys taking the location from his memory" Sirius said "It also applies to me - no one can take the secret from me by force"

"Wow" Susan said "What's the other thing?"

"It contains a minor obliviation charm" Harry said, coming down the stairs with Sally "If you haven't been told the secret, then you won't even be aware there is a secret to keep" He turned to Sally "When I went inside to get Uncle Mike, you couldn't remember having seen me, could you?"

"No" Sally replied "It was as if you had never been there" She looked at her mother, who nodded in agreement.

"It also means" Hermione added "That if anyone followed one of us back here, then we would vanish, and whoever was following us would forget why they were following us"

"What if they were touching you when you cross the property boundary?" Susan asked.

"They can't" Harry said with a smirk "If they are touching someone, they would simply let go and turn back" He smiled at Sirius "Uncle Mike made sure we were as safe as possible"

"Your mother was an exceptional witch" Susan said with a sad smile, one which Sirius returned. Then he snapped his fingers and turned to Sally.

"I forgot - Happy Birthday Sally!" He said with a smile, then held his hands up as three pillows hit him at once "What?"

"I told you!" Harry said with a smirk "We are not celebrating until tomorrow!"

"Sorry - I forgot" Sirius turned to Sally with a smile "Forgive me?"

"Yes" Sally replied "So - mum - looking forward to your holiday?"

"I think so... yes" Susan replied "But..."

"But what?" Hermione asked.

"Are you sure she will be safe?" Susan looked at her daughter "With Voldemort back - I am just a little concerned"

"Susan - I promise she will be perfectly safe" Sirius said "And we have a plan to protect us if we go out and about" He looked over at Harry and Hermione "Shall we show them?" Harry pulled out his wand, and then cast a glamour spell on Sally. Instead of the curly-blond-haired girl with blue eyes, Sally now appeared to be a black-haired girl with hazel eyes. Susan's mouth fell open.

"Try to dispel it" Hermione said with a smile. Susan lifted her wand.

"Finite Incantatum" She said, then turned back to Hermione "It is reversible, isn't it?" Hermione nodded, then, along with Sirius and Harry, they cast the same spell, but Hermione cast it on a chair, Sirius cast it on the fireplace and Harry cast it on Sally, and a second later she returned to normal. Susan stared at her, then turned to Harry with a questioning look.

"My Uncle developed a way to bind a spell to a number of magical cores. It makes it almost impossible to dispel, and also makes it harder to detect" He smiled "Mrs Perks..."

"Susan"

"Susan - trust me. I won't let anything happen to your daughter if I can prevent it" Harry said, looking across at Sally. She smiled back, causing her mother to glance between the two of them, then smile to herself.

"Okay" She turned to Sirius "Will I be able to send you owls?"

"Do you have an owl?" He asked, and when Susan shook her head, he turned to Harry "Can I?"

"Of course"

"Elana" Sirius called out, and a few seconds later, Harry's tawny owl flew in and settled on the table in front of Sirius "Elana, this is Susan. When do you arrive at your destination?"

"I should be there on Tuesday"

"Okay. Elana - I want you to go and stay with Susan on Tuesday, and would you be willing to deliver mail for her while she is on holiday?" Elana flew over to Susan, then looked her up and down for a moment. Then the owl flew back to Sirius and bobbed her head up and down in agreement "Thank you girl" Elana bobbed her head again, then flew off.

"Thank you" Susan said, then glanced at the clock "I'm sorry, but I really have to go" She stood up and turned to her daughter "Walk me out?"

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Later that night, the three of them were in Sally's room, talking about the day, and their plans for the holidays.

"Do you think she will be okay?" Sally asked.

"She will be fine" Hermione said "And if there is anything wrong then..." She looked over at Harry, who nodded "We cast a protection spell on your mother when she crossed the wards. It will alert Uncle

Mike if anything happens" She watched as Sally looked at Harry, then smiled.

"Thank you" She said to both of them "So - what are we going to do this summer?"

"Well - we thought we could show you around. We both grew up here - well for part of our lives anyway" Hermione said.

"And..." Harry started, then trailed off.

"And what?" Sally asked.

"Well - after the fight in the chamber, I thought we could do some training" Harry continued.

"You don't think Voldemort is gone?" She asked in surprise.

"I don't know" Harry said "But the world thought he was dead when he vanished ten years ago, and he wasn't. I am not sure he is gone this time"

"So - what training?" Sally asked "And how are you going to get around the underage magic restrictions?"

"How do you think?" Hermione asked, looking smug.

"You can't tamper with the wands" Sally looked at them "When you return to Hogwarts, someone would notice. So it has to be something to do with being here" She looked around, then smacked her head with her hand "It has to be something to do with being in an unplotable house located under a fidelius charm that would prevent any magic you do from being detected" She looked at Hermione "How long did it take you to figure out?"

"Two hours in to my third visit" Hermione replied "We were in the back garden, and I cut my hand. Harry healed it before I could stop him. I kept expecting the DMLE to burst in and cart us off to the tower, and I only realised two hours later why that hadn't happened. I think I felt as dumb as you do now"

"So that was how you managed to the disguise spell earlier?" Harry and Hermione both nodded "This summer is going to be fun" She turned to Hermione "Are you staying?"

"I am tonight" She replied "But I only live two minutes away, so I will be here quite a lot" She glanced at Harry "My parents do want to see me every so often"

"Makes sense" Sally replied "So how does this disguise thing work?"

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Harry jolted awake and looked around.

"This isn't my lounge" He said to himself, then he span around at the sound of the voice behind him.

"No kidding" Sally said. She was stood next to Hermione and - like Harry - they were dressed in their bed clothes "Where is this place?"

"It looks familiar" Harry started walking towards a door. The two girls followed him, then all three stared in to a place that two of them recognised at once, and the other recognised because of the people there.

"The chamber?" Hermione said, as she stared at the scene in front of her "Why are we back here?"

"And why are we out there?" Sally pointed to where she and Harry had been - and were now - standing during the fight against Quirrell and Voldemort.

"This is..." Hermione trailed off in confusion "What the hell is going on?"

"You don't know?" Quirrell asked, turning away from the mirror and looking at them "You don't remember?"

"Remember what?" Harry asked "We fought you. You lost. You and your dark master"

"Then why do you think you are here?" The late-professor turned and stared at Hermione "The muggle-born can't remember what she didn't see, and you can't remember what didn't happen" Quirrell turned and flung a fireball across the room, and the three kids watched as the... other Sally vanished in a ball of flame. Hermione and Harry turned to Sally, but she seemed fine.

"Then why are we here?" Harry asked again "Because if you want us for something, then tell us, otherwise we have better things to do"

"I am not the one who brought you" Quirrell smirked.

"Then who did?" Hermione asked.

"I did" The other Harry said, walking towards them. He glanced at Quirrell, then - with a flick of his hand, sent Quirrell flying across the room. Then he smirked, and turned back to the three students "Memories are fun"

"Memories?" Sally asked.

"You three are dreaming" Harry said "And you are here because I... because Harry forgot something"

"What?" Hermione asked.

"I don't remember" Both Harry's said in unison, then dream Harry continued "Harry's mind is very, very well organized, and although he hasn't noticed, there is a hole in it. Something that was there is now missing"

Suddenly the room shifted, and the three of them found themselves in the Hogwarts Library. Harry looked around, then pointed at the nearest shelf.

"This is your mind?" Hermione asked.

"Michael taught me Occlumency when I was young, to hide the fact I was Harry. This is how I sorted my mind out" Harry was still staring at the shelf "That's not right" He pointed to the a book in the shelf that was jet black, with no writing on.

"Don't you forget things?" Sally asked, looking around.

"Yes" Harry said "But then the book vanishes, and there is a gap. And sometimes I... defragment my mind, and the spaces are filled with more recent memories" He walked over and peered at the black book "This looks like someone has taken a memory from me"

"Obliviation" Hermione said in surprise "Why? Who? When? Why?"

"I don't know" Harry said "But I think we should find out"

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Harry jolted awake and looked around.

"Well - that was odd"

"No kidding" Sally said, sitting up across the room from him. They turned and saw Hermione waking up.

"Harry did you dream about..."

"... Quirrell and..."

"...a black book" Sally finished. The three of them looked at each other.

"We should talk to Uncle Mike" Harry stood up, but then saw Sally shake her head.

"It's the middle of the night" She said softly "I think this can at least wait until morning"

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The next morning they all sat down to breakfast with Sirius. They had explained what had happened the night before, and Harry had told Sirius all about the missing memory.

"So - why would someone want to obliviate you?" Sirius asked. Sally and Hermione looked at him, then at Harry.

"He is trying to teach me critical thinking" Harry said "He thinks it will make me a better student"

"Oh" Sally said "It has to be connected to the fight with Voldemort"

"Something we were told?" Harry asked "Quirrell or Voldemort told us something that someone didn't want us to know?"

"But who would remove it?" Sirius asked "And what was it?" The three kids looked at each other, but none of them could come up with answers. Harry turned back to Sirius "Is there no way to find out?"



"Maybe" Sirius replied "Why don't you go out and enjoy your birthday-day, and I will do some research" He looked at Sally "You can show the birthday girl around the neighbourhood"

## Chapter 2

Two hours later, they returned from their trip around the town to find Sirius sat at the dining room table, surrounded by books.

"Richard, Miranda" He said, then turned to Sally "Summer"

"Uncle Mike" They replied together, then Harry - who was in disguise as Richard, asked "Did you find anything?"

"I think so" He looked up "Why don't you three go change, and I will let you know what we can do"

"Okay"

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"If you will both trust me, I can use legilimency and a memory spell to try to fill in the gap that was created by the obliviation" He turned to Sally "I think you were obliterated too, but since you haven't learned occlumency, you wouldn't have noticed it"

"Makes sense"

"Sally - you have to be sure of this. If I go in to your mind, I might learn some things you would rather I kept private" He held up his wand "If I give you an oath not to reveal anything I learn, will you let me see in to your thoughts?"

"If you think it is necessary" Sally replied, glancing at Harry.

"I solemnly swear I will not reveal anything I learn in Sally-Ann Perks' mind" There was a faint flash of light, then Sirius looked down at the book "Okay. Let's begin"

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"I am telling you Gin - he isn't worth it" Ron said. He and his sister were de-gnoming their back garden, and he was telling her about Harry Potter. Ginny's crush hadn't subsided in the year he had been in school, if anything it had grown stronger. She was still convinced that Harry was her future, and that Ron should help her to land The Boy Who Lived.

"He is wonderful" Ginny said "How can he not be worth it?"

"He is self-centered, arrogant and doesn't care about anyone else" Ron replied "He was rude to all the teachers, and his idea of loyalty to his house was a joke" He looked around "And he brought a Hufflepuff in to our house" He looked down at this sister, but she didn't appear to be paying any attention. He decided to talk to his mother as soon as he could.

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Draco looked at the diary in his hands, then handed it back to his father. Lucius took it, and put it back in his robes.

"What can you tell me about the Potter boy?" Lucius asked.

"He is disliked by most of the school" Draco replied "The Hufflepuffs hate him because of the Perks girl, and his own house hates him for much the same reason. And we hate him because of what he did to our Lord"

"And because of what he did to you?" Lucius sneered "Don't think I have forgotten how he humiliated you. Not once, but twice"

"No father" Draco bowed his head.

"What about the Weasley brats?"

"They spent the year trying to make friends with him, but he didn't seem to want anything to do with them"

"But you said he seemed to want to help people? A white-knight complex?"

"Yes"

"So - if we continue with our plan, then Potter will interfere?"

"If he treats her like he treats the rest of the Weasleys, he shouldn't be a problem"

"Excellent"

Neither of the Malfoys noticed their house-elf in the corner of the room.

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"It was Dumbledore" Sirius said. He had spent two hours combing through Sally and Harry's minds, and had found the clue he was looking for.

"The Headmaster?" Hermione asked, but then her mouth fell open in surprise.

"Hermione?" Both Harry and Sally were looking at her with concern.

"When I came back to the chamber with the Headmaster, he made me stand at the entrance while he cast some detection spells" She looked over at Sirius "Is it possible he did something else?"

"It's possible" Sirius looked at Harry in concern "But obliviation is an exact science, and he shouldn't have been able to get beyond your occlumency shields"

"Even while he was unconscious?" Sally asked in surprise.

"They are second nature" Harry replied with a smile "And they only fail when I am dead" He looked at Sally, then back at Sirius "But Sally's mind was unprotected" He paused for a moment "Could he have read her mind, then used her memory to target mine?"

"That is remarkably advanced magic" Sirius replied "But probably not beyond Dumbledore" He stood up and started pacing back and forth "It would explain why you are both missing the same memory" He glanced at Harry, and suddenly the thought 'And also why Dumbledore is not coming to arrest me' formed in his head. He smiled, then turned back to Sally "I think we can recover the memory, but it would require me to enter your mind again"

"I don't mind, Uncle Mike" Sally replied with a smile, then looked at Harry "Can you do the same for Harry?"

"Yes - but he has already had me in his mind, and wouldn't let me back in without me asking anyway"

"You trained me well" Harry replied "So - when do we start?"

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"Mum - you have to do something" Ron was sat in the kitchen of The Burrow, along with his brother Percy "She is already planning their wedding!"

"Would that be so bad?" Molly asked "He is the Heir Of The House Of Potter - the sole heir as it stands, so marrying into that would be quite a coup" She looked around the kitchen, then walked over and picked up a pan "And besides - you know what Headmaster Dumbledore said - Harry's home life with his guardian isn't all that happy, and he needs all the friends he can get"

"Then he should try making them" Ron snarled, then turned to his brother "You are being very quiet"

"I don't have a lot to say" Percy replied "Potter's behaviour over the last year was appalling, but if what the Headmaster says is true then it might be excusable. And maybe we can provide a balance to the wayward influences in his life"

"And you think Ginny can help you with that?" Ron asked.

"If Ginny hated him, or even disliked him in anyway, and we were asking her to prostitute herself, then yes - it would make me a little uncomfortable" Percy frowned "But she clearly likes him, and if she can make friends with him, all the better"

"But what about Perks and Granger?" He turned to his mother "He obviously likes both of them, and from the way he was looking at them, it might be more"

"The Potter Line is one of the oldest and most noble in the world" Molly replied with a superior smirk "And even his American guardian" she continued, her voice now dripping with sarcasm "must understand what that means. The last scion of The Potter Line can not, will not be allowed to marry beneath his station. The Perks family, though once noble, is a pathetic shadow of its former self, and she is nowhere near good enough to be his consort"

"And the Granger girl?" Percy asked.

"A muggle-born for a consort?" Molly laughed "Even if he wanted to, the Wizengamot would never permit it" She thought about Albus' reaction to the friendships Harry had developed "Ginny is a much more suitable match, and I am sure that this coming year will make that obvious to him"

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"You know I can't do that"

"May I ask why not?"

"Because I was not created as a tool of The Headmaster. I serve the school, I served The Founders and - should the gods wish their revelation - I serve The Heirs of The Founders" The Sorting Hat replied "Asking me to decide where a student will go before the sorting is beyond my abilities"

"But the benefits to the school will be immense" Dumbledore replied "By placing her in Gryffindor, you will ensure the fight against the coming dark will end well"

"Headmaster - enough" The volume at which The Hat spoke didn't change, but the tone was enough to silence Dumbledore anyway "I sort each student as befits their need, and I will NOT let you bypass that judgment just because you believe you know better"

Dumbledore sighed, and turned away from The Hat and back to his desk. If he couldn't ensure that the last of the Weasleys would be in Harry's house, then he would have to curtail the boy's independence another way. He looked down at the papers on his desk, then smiled. He had the perfect choice for the Quirrell's replacement. If Voldemort was back, Harry was prophesied to fight him. And if the training he had was not up to par, then the boy would have to come to him for help. And once he could get himself in the position of Harry's mentor, then Harry would have to listen to him and obey him, and would also ensure that certain facts about Voldemort's past never saw the light of day.

"Mr Lockheart - your time, it seems, has come"

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"Did you know about this?" Harry asked Sirius "Anything at all?"

"I swear I knew nothing, Harry" Sirius replied "James never told me why he went in to hiding, and I just thought he was targeted because he was a part of Dumbledore's Army"

"But why would he want to remove that from your memory?" Hermione asked "I mean - wouldn't it be better if you knew why Voldemort wants you dead?"

"I can think of two reasons" Sirius said "And I guess the one you'll believe depends on your view of your illustrious Headmaster" He looked at the three kids "Or will form it"

"So - why?" Sally asked.

"The first reason is the nice one" He looked at his godson "You are just a kid, nephew of mine, and you should enjoy your childhood. You should be playing games, going to dances" He glanced at Sally, then back at Harry "Fall in love. You shouldn't be saddled with the knowledge that a Dark Lord wants you dead, and that you are the only one in the world who can stop him - it kind of makes playing a little... pointless"

"So Dumbledore would be doing a nice thing?" Hermione asked, sounding skeptical.

"He might have done it as a side effect of the other reason" Sirius replied "Dumbledore doesn't like me. And he REALLY doesn't like that you are my ward"

"Why?" Sally asked.

"Because - if I am the only one who can fight Voldemort, then he thinks I need protecting" Sirius watched as Harry thought it through "And..." Harry turned to Sirius, who nodded "And he wants me to be dependent on him, on Dumbledore" He added when the two girls looked confused "While I am Uncle Mike's ward, I can't be his, and I am less likely to blindly follow his orders"

"Such as being friends with Ron?" Sally said "And not being friends with me"

"And if Harry, and Uncle Mike, don't know about the prophecy" Hermione continued "They would have to ask Dumbledore about it, and both of them would be dependent on him"

"And if the danger increases - when the danger increases - then our beloved and glorious Headmaster would have a valid reason to ask the Wizengamot to transfer Harry's guardianship to someone more appropriate" He looked at Harry, then at the two girls "We are going to have to teach them occlumency"

"Really?" Hermione sounded excited, causing Harry to smile.

"As bad as it sounds, we need to protect your minds from Dumbledore - if he learns that you two have relearned the prophecy, he won't have any qualms about removing it again" He looked at Harry "Or taking more serious action" He glanced at the girls "I already know the answer, but if you two would like to end..."

"No"

"No"

"I know, but I had to offer" Sirius smiled "So - who do you want to teach?"

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Over the next four weeks, Sirius taught Sally, and Harry taught Hermione. Harry asked for this arrangement, then had to explain to Sally why he had asked for this arrangement.

"Teaching you would require me to be entering your mind every day until we are done" Harry said "And I might learn some things about you..." He blushed.

"Go on"

"I like you" He said softly "And I think you like me. And I was wondering if we might like each other, and..."

"Are you asking me to be your girlfriend?"

"Sort of" Harry said, then - when Sally frowned - he continued "I like that we are friends, but I also like that Minnie and I are friends. But I also like you different to how I like her"

"And?"

"I don't want to hurt her, or upset her" She stared at him "If we get together, then..."

"Oh!" Sally said, suddenly understanding "Then how about this - we are going to be together for the next four weeks, and Hermione will be with us for most of that. So why don't we see how it goes, and talk again when we go back to school" She watched as he thought about it, then nodded "So why do you not want to teach me?"



"Have you been on a date with anyone? Or is there anyone you have liked?"

"Maybe" Sally blushed.

"And would you want him knowing every thought, every dream, every fantasy and every fear in your mind?" He saw the shocked look on her face "I have been friends with Hermione for years, and I can guess most of what is in her mind, and Michael will keep to his promise about keeping your secrets"

As well as occlumency, Sirius started training the three students in basic dueling techniques.

"You are not to use this against other students" He said "Unless they attack you first, but aside from that, these skills are only to be used against... well against anyone who would do you harm" He looked at each of them in turn "Voldemort could have killed you, and I don't want you to find yourself in that situation again"

By the end of the holidays they had learned how to disarm an opponent, to stun them, to petrify them and, if none of those steps worked, to cause light injury so that the three of them could run away to summon help.

Both Sally and Hermione had learned enough occlumency to keep both Harry and Sirius out for long enough to break contact. Harry had agreed to continue teaching them when they returned to Hogwarts, after Sirius had agreed to teach both Hermione and Sally the obliviation spell, in case Harry learned anything that he didn't want to know.

The night before Sally's mother was due back, Harry asked Sally to be his girlfriend. When she said yes, he managed to attract the attention of Sirius by shouting "YES" at a surprisingly loud volume.

When Hermione came over the next morning, to welcome Susan home, she gave Sally a hug, and if anything, seemed more excited by the news than either member of the new couple did.

"Not to put a damper on this, but how do you think Dumbledore will say about this new development?" She asked as the three of them waited outside.

"I don't think he will approve" A voice came from behind them "But, personally, I think it is fantastic"

"MUM!!!"

## Chapter 3

The next morning, the seven of them met up at Sirius' house, and then set off to Diagon Alley. Claire and Arnold were told the secret, then both gasped in surprise when the house came in to view. They also seemed to be quiet happy that Harry was going out with Sally, rather than Hermione, and Harry was pretty sure that they remembered "Aaron", and smirked at the thought of what they would have said if things had been different.

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"For Merlin's sake Ginny - calm down!" Molly was trying to organize her family so they could go to Diagon Alley, but her only daughter was bouncing up and down as if she was possessed.

"But mum - I am going to see him today!!" Ginny ran off again to look in a mirror. Molly watched her, and wondered how her husband would feel if she stunned his youngest child.

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Draco looked up at his father, then down at the diary.

"You are sure they will be at Diagon Alley today?" Lucius asked.

"Yes father" Draco replied "All the students tend to go on the same day, and they are nothing if not traditionalists"

"Father in The Ministry, mother stays home. Very traditional indeed" Lucius sneered "Very well - I will need you to cause a distraction, so that I will have an excuse to approach them" He saw Draco look at him curiously "Oh for goodness sake Draco - haven't you learned anything?" Lucius stood up and towered over his son "I can't confront them directly, without provocation, because even a simpleton like Weasley will realise something is wrong. But if you pick an argument with one of his children..."

"Then you give the Weaslette the diary with no problems" Draco nodded, then he looked up at his father "If I do this, will you get me on the team?"

"I have been talking to the other parents, and I think that your team could do with a better seeker, but I would expect results"

"And the brooms?"

"One thing at a time, my son"

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"So - where do we need to go?" Susan asked, then looked at her daughter "Are you going to try out for seeker this year?"

"Why should I bother?" Sally asked, smiling "Only two people in the house actually like me - or even put up with me - and after the lessons Dad left me, it seems to be too easy to bother with" She looked at the others "I know how that sounds"

"Good" Susan smirked "I would hate to think I raised you wrong" She looked at the group.

"So - the bookshop?" Hermione said, then smiled sheepishly as both of her parents laughed. They walked down the street towards Flourish and Blots, but slowed considerably when they saw the crowd outside the shop.

"Oh no" Susan moaned, and pointed out a poster.

"Gilderoy Lockheart will be signing copies of his books today" Claire read, then turned to Susan "Who's Gilderoy Lockheart?"

"A huge, self-publicizing, attention seeking phoney" Susan replied, causing Sirius to nod and Hermione to gasp in outrage.

"How can you say that?" She yelled.

"Because it's true" Susan replied.

"But look at his books" Hermione said, gesturing to the window of the shop "All that he's done"

"You could say the same about me - all the books that sing my praises for ridding the world of Voldemort make me out to be something I'm not"

"But that's different" Hermione said "You were just a baby, and they are saying what they think the truth is" She turned back to Susan "But Lockheart's books are all written by himself, and he would know the truth about his own life"

"Well - I went to school with him" Susan said "And in the seven years I was there, he didn't display any real skills or talent. He was mediocre at best, and a useless wazzock at worst" She smiled at the young girl "Maybe he flourished after he left Hogwarts" There was a moment's silence, then Hermione nodded.

"That must be it" She sniffed.

"Anyway - shall we go?" Harry said "We will need books, even if he is in there" They all walked towards the shop, and then realised it wouldn't take them all that long - the queue and crowds were all for Lockheart and the book signing - if they just wanted to buy them, they could be in and out in five minutes"

A few minutes later, they had reached the tills, and were about to pay, when they heard a voice ring out.

"Merlin's Beard! Is that Harry Potter?"

They turned to see Lockheart, and everyone else in the shop, staring at their group.

"I don't suppose I can say 'No - it's Luke Skywalker' can I?" Harry whispered, causing Sally and Hermione to snigger. Then he felt a hand grab his shoulder, and without realising, he pulled out his wand and whirled round. He was happy, and not at all surprised, to see that Hermione and Sally had moved up to flank him, both holding their wands out, and that Sirius and Susan also had their wands out, covering the shop.

The Daily Prophet photographer, on the other hand, looked not at all happy, but very surprised, to be staring five wands in the face.

"Sorry" He said "Didn't mean to scare you"

Harry glared at him for a moment, then shrugged and put his wand down.

"Well - you did" Harry looked around as the others lowered their wands as well "Sorry"

"I just wondered if you wanted your picture taken with Mr Lockheart" The photographer continued, pulling him towards the front. Harry

glanced at Sirius, who nodded, so Harry let himself be pulled to where Lockheart was standing.

"Smile, Harry - together we rate the front page" Lockheart beamed, putting his arm around the boy.

"I have been on the front page on my own" Harry said under his breath, but since Lockheart stiffened for an instant, Harry assumed he hadn't said it quietly enough. He thought about mentioning what Susan thought about him, but decided not to push it.

After the photographer had finished, Lockheart cleared his throat.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, boys and girls. I was going to wait, but this seems like an appropriate moment" He looked around "When young Harry entered the shop today, he didn't realise he was going to be meeting with his new Defence Against The Dark Arts teacher" A wave of gasps swept through the shop "And to mark this very special event, Harry will be leaving with a complete set of my books, free of charge!"

There was a burst of applause, and Harry looked over at his friends. Hermione was stood with her hands to her mouth, while Sirius was clearly smirking at Harry's current predicament. Susan looked faintly disgusted, while Hermione's parents just looked confused. But, as his eyes met Sally's, he couldn't help smiling, as she had nothing but sympathy on her face. He looked back as seven books were pushed in to his arms, then glancing at Sally one more time, he turned back to Lockheart.

"Thank you, Mr Lockheart, but since I am the Heir To The House Of Potter, I am capable of buying my own books. Perhaps you would consider giving them to someone who needs them" He paused "And since you have assigned all seven books to every student in the school, it shouldn't be that hard to find someone who can use them" He didn't wait for a reaction, but instead simply walked away from the now speechless teacher towards the door to the street.

Just as he reached the door, he felt a light touch on his back, and turned to see Sally and Hermione stood there. Before he could say anything, Sally reached out and hugged him, and then - to his surprise - gently kissed him on the lips.

-----

Ginny watched with a smile as Harry told Lockheart off, and then held her breath as he came towards her. 'This was it!' she thought, but then her face froze as two girls walked up behind him. She knew their names - her brother had been very helpful in telling her stories over the summer - and recognised one of them from the year before on the platform.

'And' She thought 'The Granger girl hasn't got any prettier'

But then her mouth fell open in shock as the blond girl - 'Sally-Ann Perks' her mind supplied - leaned over and kissed Harry.

-----

"So - Potter's got himself a girlfriend" A voice drawled from above them, and both Harry and Sally looked up to see Draco Malfoy coming down from the second floor "Tell me something Perks - was it the money, or the fame?"

"Shut it Malfoy!" Ginny yelled in reply, then realised what she had said and blushed bright red. But then Harry smiled at her, and she felt everything was going to be all right.

"Jealous, Draco?" Hermione smirked.

"Of Potter? Please!"

"I meant of Sally" She continued, ignoring the look on his face "Well - you did spend a lot of last year trying to annoy Harry" She looked around "Just like the boys who used to pull my hair and run away back in junior school"

"HOW DARE YOU, YOU FILTHY LITTLE MUDBLOOD!" Hermione looked at him questioningly, having no idea what he said, but then realised that not only did Harry and Sally have their wands out and pointed at the Slytherin boy, but so did Ron, Ginny, Fred and George.

"Now, now Draco" Came a silky voice from the door "You know how some people still consider that term offensive"

"Yes father" Draco replied, then turned back "My apologies, Miss Granger, for any offence I might have caused"

"Very good, my son" Lucius looked around "You must be Mr Potter - my name is Lucius Malfoy. I was at school with your parents"

"Pleased to meet you" Harry said in a polite tone, although all he wanted to do was get out of the shop as soon as possible "May I introduce my good friend, Miss Hermione Granger, and my girlfriend, Miss Sally-Ann Perks"

"And - with the red hair - you must be Arthur's children" He reached over and pulled a book out of Ginny's cauldron "Second hand, I see?" He put it back with a sigh "What is the use of being a disgrace to the name of wizards if it doesn't even pay well?"

"Perhaps, Lucius, they have a difference opinion as to what disgraces the name of wizards" Susan came up behind her daughter.

"Mrs Perks" Lucius turned "How nice to see you again" He gestured to his son "Have you met my son, Draco?" Susan looked at the boy, then back at his father.

"The sneer's genetic. Who knew?" She smiled, both at the expression of amusement on the faces of Harry and Hermione, and the look of utter confusion on the faces of both Malfoys and all four Weasleys.

"Come, Draco" Lucius turned away, and stalked out of the shop, trailed by his son. Once they were gone, Harry turned to Hermione.

"Sorry about that" He squeezed her hand "Malfoy shouldn't have insulted you like that"

"To be honest, I have no idea what he called me" She smiled, then turned to the rest of the group "But thank you all for standing up for me" She looked over at Ginny "I don't believe we have been introduced. My name is..."

"Hermione Granger" Ginny replied "I heard Harry before. I'm Ginny"

"It's nice to meet you" Hermione said with a smile "Are you coming to Hogwarts this year?"



"Yes" Was the only response she got, but it wasn't directed at her. Hermione followed the girl's gaze, and saw it was focused on Harry, who was stood hand-in-hand with Sally a few feet away.

"Well - I am sure we will see you on the Express" She turned as her parents called to her, then she, and the rest of the group, left the shop and walked back to The Leakey Cauldron.

-----

On the drive back, Susan turned to Harry and her daughter.

"I thought you were going to keep it quiet?"

"We were" Harry said, glancing at Sally "But the someone decided to kiss me, and after that the secret seemed to be out"

"Sorry" Sally ducked her head, but then smiled "But after what you said to Lockheart, and how annoyed you looked, I couldn't help myself"

"Yes, Harry" Hermione glared at him "About what you said to Lockheart..."

"SEVEN BOOKS!" He cried "Seven books! How are we going to need seven books for a single class for a year?" He frowned "And even though I wouldn't call the Weasleys friends, there are five of them at the school this year - that's over 200 galleons for one class! So, if he was being generous, why not help someone out who needs it, rather than someone who doesn't want it?"

"What's the House Of Potter?" Claire asked from the front seat. Harry turned to Sirius, who nodded and, in turn, looked at Claire.

"Before The Ministry was founded, the magical world was more or less run on a feudal basis. There were a number of large families who held the power, and the seven largest of these were the Malfoys, Bones, Dumbledores, Blacks, Longbottoms, Weasleys and, of course, the Potters, so they pretty much ruled the magical world" He paused "You with me so far?"

"I think so"

"Well - as you can imagine, the seven families I mentioned got to be very rich. And while some used that money and power for bad, like

the Blacks and the Malfoys, others used it for good, like the Weasleys, Longbottoms and Potters"

"Okay"

"When The Ministry was founded, the families lost a lot of their power, if not their influence, but they kept their money" He looked at Harry "It is not overstating it to say that when Harry comes of age, he may well be the richest wizard in the country" There was a long period of silence as everyone contemplated this.

"But if the Malfoys were part of this group..."

"They lost a lot of their money in the first war" Susan replied "Some to finance Voldemort, and far more to buy their way out of prison after it ended"

"So that's why Draco could be jealous?" Sally asked, causing Harry to frown at her, and Hermione to giggle "But... Ginny was it?" Hermione nodded "Put him in his place!"

"Why?" Harry asked, causing both girls to roll their eyes "Is this another girl thing?"

"She has a crush on you" Sally said softly.

"Oh"

"You are the hero of the magical world" Susan continued "She will have grown up hearing your story, and so she might have put you up on a pedestal"

"So why didn't you?" He asked Sally.

"Mum made sure to tell me you are only human" Sally smirked "And also she told me a lot of stories about your father, just to balance things out"

"That would explain it" Sirius said with a smile, then turned to his nephew "So - what are you going to do?"

"I don't know" Harry sighed "But I am sure that my two favourite people will be able to help" He smiled at Hermione and Sally "And who knows - maybe she won't end up in Gryffindor"

"Are you kidding?" Sally laughed "There hasn't been a Weasley who wasn't a Lion since..." She looked at her mother, then said "Ever"

"Oh boy"

## Chapter 4

"So - how long before we are interrupted?" Sally leaned back in her seat on the Express.

"Five minutes" Harry sighed as he sat down next to her "By Ron and his sister"

"Ten, by Malfoy and his goons" Hermione replied.

"Both" Sally smirked, causing the other two to laugh. Then she looked at Hermione "About the boyfriend, girlfriend thing?"

"Yes?" Hermione looked at Harry, who rolled his eyes.

"You really don't mind?"

"For the billionth time, no - I really don't mind" Hermione smiled "But are you ready to deal with the teasing and stuff?"

"If Harry will help me" Sally smiled at her boyfriend, who nodded and smiled back "Excellent"

-----

"Harry - I was wondering if we could be friends" Ron said. True to Harry's prediction, Ron and Ginny had come in to the carriage almost as soon as the train pulled away.

"You mean we aren't friends now?" Harry asked.

"Oh" Ron stopped, then shrugged "Okay"

"And I hope we can become friends" Ginny said, sitting down next to Harry.

"I am sure we will" Harry replied, then leaned over and kissed Sally on the top of her head. Hermione snorted, causing everyone to look round at her.

"Sorry - just thinking about something from last night"

"Of course" Sally smirked, then, taking Harry's hand, she turned to Ginny "So - Miss Weasley - tell us all about yourself"

-----  
By the time the train pulled in to the Hogsmeade station, Sally was convinced of two things.

First was that Ginny really wanted to be Harry's girlfriend - and wife in all probability - and was willing to do anything to get there.

And the second was that Harry wanted nothing to do with her. He had been polite and friendly, but had shown no signs of returning the affection or desire Ginny was exhibiting.

When they climbed off the train, and Ginny followed Hagrid, along with the rest of the first years, Harry, Hermione and Sally walked along to the carriages they had travelled in the year before.

"Where are the first years going?" Sally asked.

"To the boats" Someone replied from behind them. They turned to see Hannah and Susan walking up behind them "Don't you remember... oh - no"

"We went in the carriages last year" Sally replied, then - taking a chance - continued "How was your summer?"

"It was okay" Susan replied "But I missed my house mates" She looked down to where Harry and Sally were holding hands "And clearly you didn't" She looked over at Hannah "You were right"

"Pardon?" Hermione asked, looking between the two girls.

"After Perks betrayed her house" Hannah noticed Harry frown, but ignored it "And started hanging around with you two, a small debate started as to whether she was after Harry, after you or just a generic traitor to the Hufflepuff Cause" She looked at the joined hands "Seems I was right" Hermione looked over at the couple, and realised both of them were looking annoyed.

"We should be going" Hermione said, taking both of them by the hand and pulling them in to a carriage. As it pulled away, she turned to her friends "Harry - you should know better than that!"

"Sorry?" He looked surprised.

"Remember Tristen?" There was a pause, then Harry smiled and nodded. Hermione turned to Sally "Back when Harry was going under another name, he beat up a boy named Tristen because he said something mean about me"

"He was asking for it" Harry protested.

"He got himself suspended" Hermione glared "And promised he would never do it again" Sally turned and glared at him.

"So what were you going to do to them?" She asked.

"Nothing" He replied "Well - nothing much"

"Oh honey" Sally said softly "Why do you let them annoy you?" She leaned her head on his shoulder "And after spending all that time with Ginny?"

"They were saying mean things about you" He stroked the back of her hand "I didn't seem nice" Hermione smiled at the pair of them.

"How about you agree that you won't pay any more attention to what anyone says" She said to both of them "And that way neither of you will get expelled" She realised they were both staring at her "My grandmother says it a lot to my mum and aunt"

"Your mother keeps getting expelled?" Sally said with a smile, causing Harry to laugh, and Hermione to throw a cushion at her.

"So - what are you going to do about people?" Hermione asked "Hannah and Susan aren't going to be the only ones who will talk about it" She paused for a moment "Dumbledore will almost certainly have something to say"

"Honestly, I don't think it is any of their business" Sally replied, and Harry nodded "We won't hide, and we will tell truth" She smiled at Hermione "And we will try not to get ourselves expelled"

"Good" Hermione glanced out of the window "We're here"

-----

Albus Dumbledore took his place at the staff table, and smiled. The returning students were coming into the great hall, and sitting down at their tables. He always enjoyed the first day of school - watching

friends meet up again, seeing the houses get back together - and the sorting, where a new batch of students would learn the way their future would unfold.

Suddenly the noise level in the hall dipped dramatically. He looked up, and it took all his effort to keep his mouth from falling open in surprise.

Harry Potter had walked in to the hall, hand in hand with Sally-Ann Perks. He didn't know if it meant what everyone seemed to think it meant - that they were more than just friends - but as the two of them walked over to the Gryffindor table. Then Harry mimed pulling out a chair, and pushing it back in as Sally sat. And then, as the entire hall watched in silence, he kissed her forehead, then sat down next to her. A moment later, Hermione walked in and sat down next to Harry, making Dumbledore think it was real, and quite probably for his benefit.

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"That was fun" Hermione smirked "Do you think he will mention it?"

"Not during the speech" Sally said "He will want to talk to Harry in private"

"Unless he bans dating altogether" Harry smirked, then looked around "And I don't think he can do that"

"Are there rules?" Sally asked Hermione.

"No. I mean - there are the laws, but Hogwarts has no rules"

"Cool" Sally smirked, then she fell silent as Professor Flitwick carried The Sorting Hat to the front of the hall, and placed it on a three legged stool. A moment later, Professor McGonagall ushered the group of first years, including Ginny, then lined them up in front of the Hat. For a moment, there was absolute silence, then the Hat started to sing.

The	Founders	gave	me	a	job	to	do
To	sort	the	students,	both	old	and	new
And	I	alone	may	make	the	choice	
For	I	am	known	as	Hogwarts'	voice	
So	step	forth	kids,	and	this	hat	wear

To learn what house will have you there  
Bold and brave is the Gryffindor's aim  
Puffers are loyal, or so they would claim  
Slytherin kids make cunning their art  
While Ravenclaw loves those who are smart

A Trio born in the last school year  
Will stand again to push back the fear  
For in these halls, new terror will lurk  
And finished will be Slytherin's evil work  
Future and Past will combine as one  
To see the work of The Dark Lord done  
Yet stand forth the three who will fight  
For Love, For Friendship, For what is right  
With skills alone that they will learn  
To stop the one true Heir's return

When the last sounds of singing died away, there was a moment of silence, then most of the students started murmuring to each other. This went on for a few minutes - Dumbledore and the rest of the staff seemed to be in a state of shock - then McGonagall stepped forward, and held up a list of names.

"Jane Abrams" A girl with dark black hair walked forward and sat on the stool. She put the Hat on, and a moment later the Hat yelled "RAVENCLAW" She took the Hat off, and walked over to the Ravenclaw table.

Harry watched her, then turned to Sally and Hermione.

"How do they know which table to go to?" He asked quietly "I mean - we knew because we were down the list, but how did Hannah know?"

"Maybe Vanessa tells the first person she sends to each house" Sally whispered back, then turned to hear a boy named Colin Creevy being sorted in to Gryffindor. He ran over, then skidded to a halt in front of Harry, stared at him for a moment, then blushed and ran off to the other end of the table. Harry could hear both Sally and Hermione chuckling, but decided to ignore them and turned back to watch the end of the sorting.

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Fifteen minutes later, they were down to the last name on the list.

"Ginevra Weasley"

Harry watched as Ginny walked over to the stool and put the Hat on.

It appeared most of the school seemed to think it was a forgone conclusion, because the noise level rose as the youngest Weasley placed the Hat on her head.

But when, after a few seconds, there was nothing forthcoming from the Hat, the students all began to quieten down, and, after a minute, everyone in the hall was staring at Ginny in fascination. After two minutes, Harry looked up at the staff table, and was surprised to see Dumbledore leaning forward, looking worried.

Another minute went by, and the entire hall was in absolute silence. When a first year Hufflepuff sneezed, Harry could have sworn that most of the students jumped three feet in the air.

But as if that were some sort of signal, the Sorting Hat opened its mouth and called out the name of Ginny's home for the next seven years, and if anything the silence in the hall got even louder.

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Ginny pulled the Hat off her head, and, for a moment, contemplated flinging it down the hall, but she realised what sort of a scene that would be, so instead she settled for dropping it on the stool.

"Miss Weasley" Professor McGonagall looked down at her "You must go and join your new house mates" She gestured to the table on the far right. Ginny stared across at the table, then back at her professor.

"Must I?"

"Yes dear, you must" The sympathy in her voice was clear, but Ginny didn't really care. She felt the urge to kick The Sorting Hat, and when she caught sight of Harry's face - and the look of pity on it - she did kick the stool, sending it flying in to the corner. Refusing to meet anyone else's gaze, she stomped over to her new table, her robes already changing colours to the new colours of green and silver.

Professor McGonagall walked over and picked up the Hat and stool, then took them off to one side.

-----

For a few moments the hall remained utterly silent, then Dumbledore suddenly stood up - as if he had just remembered what was supposed to happen next.

"Well - congratulations to the new students, and the feast begin"

-----

"Wow" Hermione said.

"You said that" Harry smiled "So - what are you wowing at this time?" In response she held up her notebook, where she had written a copy of The Sorting Hat's song "And?"

"You remember last year's song?" She asked.

"Not really, no"

"The world will tremble when the storm breaks, as from its slumber evil wakes" Sally said "And something about the skies going dark and three lions"

"How can you remember that?" Harry looked at her.

"I think that Vanessa reminded me last Halloween, and it has sort of stuck in my head" Sally replied "But I can only remember bits of the second verse - the first seems to be gone" She turned to Hermione "You think there is a connection?" Hermione looked around, then she turned back and lowered her voice.

"I admit I didn't think of it last year, but I think that..." She glanced around again "That we might be the three lions that Vanessa mentioned in the first year" She looked at Sally "Because you started as a Hufflepuff, I didn't give it a second thought, but with the line about 'A Trio born in the last school year' - we came together, and worked as a team" She saw the others looking at her, and she shrugged "Maybe I am wrong, but if you read through the rest of it, and The Hat is talking about us, then..."

"Then what?" Harry and Sally asked together.

"Then our year is going to be more... interesting than last year" Hermione replied with a grim look.

"Then lets hope Ron and the twins are this trio that will fight" Sally looked up the table, then frowned when she saw Ron glaring back at her. She shook her head, then turned back to her friends "I think he blames me"

"Of course" Harry said with a smile "He can't blame me, because he still wants to be friends, and, given Ginny's performance on the train, it's clear you are the biggest annoyance, and..." He looked up the table "If the old man is still calling the shots, he would want me dating Ginny as well"

"Because..." Hermione asked.

"Yeah" Harry looked up at the staff table again, but Dumbledore appeared to be contemplating the newest Slytherin.

"You don't think that is a bit sneaky, even for him?" Hermione asked, but Sally gave a brief laugh "Sal?"

"Minnie" She smiled as Hermione frowned at her "Oh get over it - Hermione is far too long a name, and if we are going to be this famous trio, then you need a name like ours"

"And I don't get to pick it?"

"No" Sally said firmly "But anyway - the man wiped our memories in an effort to manipulate Harry. And if you asked him, he would say it was Harry's own good" She glared up at Dumbledore "Do you think he would be above a little match-making to ensure Harry would make different friends?" She leaned over and hugged her boyfriend.

"I don't know if I believe the whole 'three lions' thing" Harry said "But you should both keep up with your occlumency, and we should all keep up with our lessons from Uncle Mike" He was about to say something else, when the hall quietened down as Dumbledore got to his feet.

"Welcome back. I have a few announcements before you return to your common rooms. The Forbidden Forest is off limits to all students, and only third years and above may go to Hogsmeade, and then only with signed permission slips from their guardians" He

looked over at the hall "To fill the post of Defence Against The Dark Arts teacher, I have the great pleasure to welcome the world renowned Gilderoy Lockheart to Hogwarts" Both Harry and Sally smirked as Hermione joined in the standing ovation that Lockheart received. When it died down, Dumbledore continued "I am sure you all wish him well in his new post" He paused, and Harry almost thought the Headmaster was about to smirk "And now - prefects, please take everyone to your houses"

-----

Ron watched his sister walk in the opposite direction, then turned to see Harry and Sally walking hand in hand towards Gryffindor tower.

"Hey!" He yelled, but neither of them stopped, so he ran up behind them and pulled on Sally's shoulder "I am talking to you"

"And we are ignoring you" Harry replied, but Sally stopped and turned round.

"What do you want, Weasley?"

"What did you do to my sister, Perks?" He nearly yelled again, but managed to keep a hold on his temper.

"Pardon me?" Sally frowned at him.

"You talked to her on the express - how did you get her into Slytherin? And why? Just so you can keep her away from Harry? Are you that insecure that you have to ruin my sister's future?" For a moment Sally just stared at him, then she laughed.

"Go away, Ronald. Your sister made her own bed, and now she has to lie in it" Sally turned "It has nothing to do with me, or my relationship with Harry"

"Don't walk away from me" He reached out to touch her again, but before he got close, Harry threw his arm out, and grabbed Ron's hand, and held it for a moment. Then he let it go, and they continued walking towards the tower.

-----

Dumbledore watched them go, then returned to his office. He looked up at The Sorting Hat.

"Are you intentionally defying me?"

"No Headmaster. I am sure if I was doing it intentionally, I would be much better at it"

"Then..."

"Tell me, Headmaster, what are the four characteristics that define the Houses?"

"Why?" Dumbledore stared up at The Hat.

"Humour me"

"Intelligence, Ambition, Loyalty and Bravery"

"And do you know what I saw in young Miss Weasley's mind?"

"Do tell"

"The one driving passion in her life - the only thing that matters to her, and maybe the only thing that has or will matter - is making Mr Potter her boyfriend, and later her husband" The Hat looked down at the Headmaster "Nothing to say?"

"Would it have been so wrong for her to be in Gryffindor?"

"Yes"

"That's it?" Dumbledore said in surprise "No further explanation?"

"What do you think I can say that you don't already know? I could tell you that The Founders did not design me and give me life to be a match-making tool, but you know that. I could tell you my loyalty is to Hogwarts, not to your or your schemes, but you know that as well. What I can tell you is that, while Ginny has bravery, loyalty and intelligence to one degree or another, her ambition is the one, single quality that defines her, along with a level of cunning and ruthlessness you rarely see in one so young"

"Then wouldn't she be better served in a house that will be more welcoming?" Dumbledore knew he was clutching at straws, but he knew that he had a limited time to get Ginny moved and into Harry's life.

"No" The Hat replied "She is a Slytherin, and belongs where she is"

"But..."

"Enough" The Hat yelled, then continued "She is a child of Salazar, and she belongs where she is"

## Chapter 5

"Dear Uncle Mike, I have a request from your nieces. They would like your blessing to continue the project you helped them with during the summer"

"Dear Harry, They have my blessing, though they should check with the others. May I ask why?"

"Father, We may have hit a slight problem with your plan. The recipient of the item has not been placed into the house she should have been. Instead she has become one of us. Do you wish me to relocate the item?"

"Dear UM. Your nephew said you wanted to know why The Trio wanted your blessing for The Project? Well - it turns out that AS was right, and our world renowned DaDa professor... well - as S put it, you could put him together and make one long plank"

"Draco, The news is unfortunate, and very unexpected. It would appear that she, at least, didn't inherit her father's lack of ambition. And with the right manipulation, she could become a useful ally - another way in to The Ministry, and a way to cause problems amongst Dumbledore's supporters when our Lord returns. But the plan is paramount, and there is no way we could transfer the item to anyone else at this stage without arousing too much suspicion. You know how I loathe to waste allies, even potential allies, but this must go as we planned. Just to satisfy my curiosity - how is she doing as one who wears the silver and green?"

"Dear Daughter, I received a letter from your Uncle, and you may tell The Trio that they have my blessing to continue The Project from the summer. Just promise me, and our friends, that you won't use what you learn without letting us know. But now - tell me how M came round to our way of thinking?"

"Dear	Uncle	Mike..."
"Dear		Mum..."
"Dear		All..."
"It happened like this"		

-----

"Welcome to your first DaDa lesson" Lockheart appeared at the top of the stairs in the DaDa classroom "With me - Gilderoy Lockheart!"

There was a wave of sighs from the girls in the class, although Harry was happy that Sally wasn't one of the ones who was staring in rapture at the man now descending the stairs.

"I know you are wondering - how did you all get so lucky to be taught by a winner of The Order Of Merlin, Honorary Member of The Dark Force Defence League and five times winner of Witch Weekly's Most Charming Smile award?"

Harry resisted the urge to snort, and, after a quick glance at Sally, realised he wasn't the only one.

"Your Headmaster has decided you should learn more about fighting The Dark Arts after the events with Quirrell, so that each of you will be able to protect yourselves if you need to"

Hermione looked at Sally, who was looking surprised at the revelation.

"But first, we should find out what you know about your new teacher, so that we all know each other" He waved his wand, and a piece of paper appeared in front of each student "You have twenty minutes"

Harry looked down at the paper, and his eyes widened in surprise. He looked at Sally, then Hermione, and was gratified to see the same look on both of their faces. The entire quiz was about Lockheart - his favourite food, his ideal birthday present (Harry thought "a framed picture of himself" would be the perfect answer) and what had been his crowning achievement.

Harry looked around, but it appeared that the three of them were the only ones who were not filling the test in. Then he heard a cough from his left, and saw Hermione staring at him. Once she had his attention, she moved her hand across the desk, then suddenly raised it up. He looked at her questioningly, but she nodded emphatically. He shrugged, then leaned over to Sally.

"Hermione says we should fill in the test, then see what happens"

"Really?"



"Really" She sighed, then picked up her pen and started answering the questions.

-----

Half an hour later, Lockheart stood in front of the class.

"I must say I am disappointed. Not one of you got all the questions right, although Miss Granger came the closest with 29 out of 30. But never mind - I am sure you will all do better next time" He turned and picked up a cloth covered item from the desk behind him "Now - I will test your ability to deal with the unexpected, as you come face to face with the most fearsome and dangerous creatures known to man!" He whipped the cover off "The Fiendish Pixies!"

There was a moment of silence as everyone in the class stared at the cage, then at Lockheart.

"Pixies?" Seamus asked.

"Freshly caught, Cornish Pixies" Lockheart explained "Now - I warn you - do not underestimate them!" He reached over and flung the cage door open.

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"...and, mother, as you can guess, there was utter and total chaos. In fact - chaos doesn't do justice. This was what chaos wants to be when it grows up. The pixies went everywhere - ripping down the pictures of Lockheart, which was quite funny, and hanging Neville Longbottom from the roof - which was less funny. Most of the class hid under their desks, but M and I were going to fight them..."

"...when I gave them a signal to wait. And - on an incidental note - teaching S the system we learned was a good idea. I know there are better methods of non-verbal communication, but this is way better than going in to their minds..."

"...so after R's signal, I waited to see what Lockheart would do. And it was really not worth the wait. I admit I don't know much about the magical world - at least not as much as I could - but when a world renowned wizard - especially one who is a winner of The Order Of Merlin, and a member of The Dark Force Defence League - squeaks, waves his wand and then gets it stolen by a pixie, then

flees from a classroom leaving students - twelve year olds - to clean up his mess, I think even I can admit that he might not be all he says he is..."

"...in the end we used the spell for stopping moving objects, and then put them back in the cage (thank you for that)..."

"... and then we simply walked out. Well - almost simply"

-----

The three of them walked down the corridor from the DaDa classroom, but by the time they reached the steps, Hermione noticed that her two friends had stopped walking and were staring at her.

"Yes?" She asked. Harry turned to Sally, who smirked, then nodded. Harry smiled at his girlfriend, then turned back to Hermione. He held up his wand.

"We were just wondering if you needed this" He waved the wand, and Hermione turned at the flash of light behind her. As it cleared, and she saw the illusion Harry had created, she turned back to them and tried to look furious.

Unfortunately, the two people facing her collapsed in to hysterics, and her "furious face" ended up smiling in embarrassment. She looked back at the leg floating in mid-air then, with a quick wave of her wand, dispelled it.

-----

"...she forgave us, and admitted she was wrong - but then she brought up a very good point. Dumbledore knows that Voldemort is back - that he isn't dead. And if you and us can work out that he won't give up trying to get a body, and trying to kill me, then why can't Dumbledore? M had two suggestions..."

"...Either he really doesn't know how bad a professor - how bad a wizard - Lockheart actually is, or he knows and has another reason for hiring him..."

"...before this summer, I would never have considered the possibility that Dumbledore would do anything like that - play games with the

future of his students - but if he is willing to strip our memories for his own reasons, it wouldn't surprise me to learn that he would hire someone who can't teach..."

"...which is why we want to learn on our own, so we won't be dependent on the Head as he doles out advice and help when he believes we need it"

"Dear S"

"Dear R"

"Dear M"

"You have our blessing, but you must promise to use it only in defence, or against Voldemort and, if they return, his death eaters. Never against students, and never, ever against innocents"

-----

"So - our first meeting" Hermione said, then - after a pause "Any ideas as to what we are going to do?" She looked at the other two "I hope you aren't going to spend the whole time kissing" She laughed as they both blushed.

"No" Sally said firmly, even though she was still blushing "Voldemort believes that Harry has the power to kill him. And whether or not that is true, Voldemort thinks it is, and he is going to keep coming after Harry"

"But we helped him" Hermione added, seeing the look on Harry's face "So we are as much a target as he is"

"More so" Harry said soberly "He knows that you - both of you - mean a lot to me, and he won't think twice about using you to get to me" He looked up at them, then continued "I won't suggest that you abandon me - I can't imagine you would - but I will suggest we learn to work on our own, as well as a team"

"My mum had some ideas on that" Hermione said, causing them to stare at her in surprise.

"Your mother?" Sally asked.

"Has advice in fighting Dark Lords?" Harry echoed.

"I know it isn't, but is this a muggle thing?" Hermione asked.

"No" They both replied, then Sally continued "It's more of a... utter disbelief thing" She looked across at Harry.

"She just seems so... harmless" He smiled at his best friend "Even when Aaron was annoying her, she never seemed threatening, or dangerous. Annoyed - yes, but never dangerous"

"She served as a dentist in the military for seven years" Hermione replied "And although she wasn't on the front lines, and I think she only went in to a battle zone once, but she was given basic training, and so on"

"So..."

"Why is she so peaceful?"

"Yeah"

"After she was discharged, she decided never to use the training, and to never do harm to anyone else if she could help it" She saw the looks on her friends' faces "Except the stuff she does as a dentist, but that isn't the same" That provoked a laugh.

"Well - Uncle Mike sent us some books, so we should have something to go on" He gestured to the pile in the corner.

"Okay" Sally said, then frowned "I feel like I should have brought something"

-----

That night, the three of them went to bed tired. Tired, but happy.

## Chapter 6

The next few weeks saw various patterns developing at Hogwarts. Lockheart continued to demonstrate just how utterly useless he was, in Hermione's words.

After the first class, Lockheart apparently decided not to bring any more "dangerous creatures" to class. Instead he told the class stories about his "heroic exploits" of the past.

Harry, Sally and Hermione had decided to go to the classes, and - at Hermione's insistence, had decided not to point out the obvious flaws in his various tales.

"If we go out of our way to disrupt his classes, then it will get back to the Headmaster"

So they behaved in his class, except for the comments they made via the hand signals that Harry and Hermione had taught Sally. They explained it was based on something they had learned at St Juliet's, so that they could communicate in class, and so that no-one else would know what they were doing. So the three students spent most of Lockheart's classes "talking" - discussing the latest deed they were witnessing, the spells they were thinking of learning in their next defence club lesson, and the latest episode of what Sally had started to refer to as "The crazy and wacky schemes of the red-headed Slytherin".

Despite understanding the reason why Hermione wanted not to draw attention to themselves, she was having a hard time restraining herself when it came to Ginny and the attention she was paying to Harry.

"Ah - remember the good old days" She said one night in the common room. She was sitting with Harry and Hermione, and all three were watching as Ron played chess against his sister.

"Which good old days were those?" Hermione asked in a loud voice.

"It was this time last year" Sally continued to watch the game going on across the room "I was a daughter of Helga, and then I spent one night sleeping on this couch" She turned back to Harry "You remember what happened next, don't you?"

"You got in a lot of trouble, and I lost a lot of points" Harry replied, causing a few people to turn and look at him.

"Oh - I remember now" Sally said with a smile, then turned to look at Ron, then lowered her voice "Do you think I should remind Weasley that it was because of him I ended up in this house?"

"I think it would only annoy him" Hermione smirked "So - yes" She looked over at Ginny "So - what do you think Dumbledore's excuse will be if you ask him?"

"That it is a special circumstance, and we should be understanding" Sally said in a superior tone, then frowned at the young girl.

"And what special circumstance is that?" Harry asked "That she should be allowed to spend time with her family, or that it will be almost impossible to seduce me from the other end of the school?"

"Either" Sally couldn't help smirking at the expression on his face "Oh honey - you should really look in the mirror right now"

"It just annoys me" He turned to face her "That interfering old man seems to think he can turn the school upside down to bend me to his will" He glanced across the room at Ginny "Do you think if you had stayed in Hufflepuff that he would be happy for you to spend your evenings here?"

"Probably not" Sally agreed "But since you are, it means I can do this" She leaned over and kissed him, then they both smirked at the squeak of annoyance from across the room.

"So - what do you think we should do tomorrow?" Hermione asked.

"I think we should carry on with the disarmer" Harry suggested, and Sally nodded in agreement.

They had decided to limit their meetings to once a week, to avoid drawing any attention to themselves. They had had four sessions, and - after seeing her in action - Harry and Hermione had pressed Sally in to taking charge of the group.

"Why me?" She has asked.

"You were taught strategy and tactics by your parents, and from all appearances, you seemed to have learned very well" Hermione

replied "And besides, Harry can't organize anything and I am far too bossy to be boss" She looked over at Harry, who nodded in agreement.

"Okay" Sally replied "I will do the planning and teaching" She glanced at Harry "I don't know if Voldemort is going to attack us, but if he does, you should lead the fight"

"OKay" They both looked across at Hermione "And what is your job going to be?"

"Duh!" Sally smirked "What do you think our resident bookworm is going to do?" Hermione mock-frowned at her "Oh come on Minnie - you know it's true"

-----

It was a few weeks later that Harry started hearing voices.

The evening had started off normally - in an attempt to avoid the youngest Weasley's latest scheme, which involved asking Harry to help her with her homework, the three friends had gone out to find an empty classroom to practice in.

They had been slightly put out to discover there were none - instead they ended up in a girl's bathroom.

"Why are we here exactly?" Harry had asked.

"No one comes in here" Sally said "Because of Myrtle" Harry was about to ask who Myrtle was, when a giggle came from behind him. He turned to see a ghostly figure of a girl behind him.

"Myrtle?" Harry asked.

"Yes" The ghost replied "You must be Harry Potter" Her eyes flicked to his forehead "The ghosts said you had come to school" She looked at the other two girls "Why are you here?"

"Can you keep a secret?" Hermione asked "You can't tell anyone - not even the Headmaster or any of the other ghosts"

"Okay" Myrtle said.

"We are teaching ourselves defence against the dark arts, because..."

"Do you go around the castle much?" Sally asked.

"Not very much" Myrtle frowned "None of the ghosts like me much"

"But have you heard about Lockheart?" Harry asked, then smiled when Myrtle giggled again "Well - we want to learn something this year"

"And we need somewhere we can practice without being disturbed" Hermione continued "So - can we use your bathroom?"

"Really?" Myrtle started bouncing up and down "You'll visit me every week?"

"Yes" Sally said brightly, and the other two nodded in agreement.

-----

An hour later they finished up, and - after promising to return the next week - they left the bathroom, and started walking back to their common room.

"So - what do you think of her?" Sally asked.

"She is a lot nicer than I thought she would be" Hermione said, then continued "From what the older students told me, she usually deserves the name Moaning Myrtle"

"Maybe she just needs friends" Harry looked thoughtful "She isn't like the other ghosts, is she?"

"What do you mean?" Sally asked, but Hermione was nodding.

"Well - the other ghosts are all... old" Harry paused "The house ghosts all look as though they date from the dark ages. And Peeves could have been around in The Age Of The Founders"

"But Myrtle is in a uniform" Sally suddenly understood "So you think she died here? Recently?"



"I think so" Hermione sighed "And if you were stuck here, day in, day out, while you watched all your friends leave, wouldn't you be a bit down?"

"I guess" Sally smiled "I admit having a fourth person we can target - so we can work together"

"And also someone we can practice on..." Harry trailed off, and then turned round on the spot.

"Kill. Maim! FEED!"

"Did you hear that?" He asked.

"Hear what?"

"There was a voice... I heard it on the... in the..."

"Harry?" Hermione walked over to him, and touched his shoulder "Are you okay?"

"I was sure I heard a voice in the walls" He shrugged again "Maybe I am just tired"

"Well then - lets get back" She smiled, and the three of them walked back off to The Tower.

-----

"So - did you hear the news?" Ron announced at breakfast the next day. The trio were sat opposite him, and he seemed very agitated about something.

"The Cannons actually won a game?" Sally asked.

"Lockheart taught a good lesson?" Hermione continued.

"Ginny spent a whole evening in the Slytherin common room?" Harry finished, causing the other two to laugh out loud. Ron glared at them, and Hermione decided to get the conversation back on course.

"What news?" She asked.

"Slytherins got themselves a new seeker" He replied "Seems that certain parents were not happy when they lost to Hufflepuff in the cup"

"So - who is it?" Harry asked, but before Ron could reply, there was a disturbance at the doors to the great hall, and all four of them turned to see Draco Malfoy swaggering into the hall, with a broomstick slung over his shoulder.

"No way" Hermione said, but Ron merely nodded. Draco walked over to his seat, and - after carefully putting down the broom he was carrying - sat down, then flashed a smirk at the four Gryffindors. They all frowned, then turned back to their table.

"So - you think Gryffindor's chances have got better or worse?" Harry said brightly.

"That's not the worst of it" Ron glowered at the far table "It seems that, along with getting Malfoy on the team, his father has generously provided Slytherin house with a complete set of new brooms" He paused to watch their reaction, then added "All of them are Nimbus 2001s"

"Oh dear" Sally said, then turned to her friends "Do you think I should reconsider?"

"Reconsider what?" Ron asked sharply.

"Try outs"

"We don't need the help of traitors" Ron snapped. Harry glared at him, then opened his mouth, but closed it again when he caught a hand gesture from Sally.

"That's okay then" Sally replied with a beaming smile "I am sure the team will do just fine with Hagan"

"Damn right" Ron nodded "We'll show him"

After breakfast the three of them set off for class.

"So - are you going to try out?" Hermione asked.

"After Ron's little snit?" Sally laughed "I have better things to do with my time. Besides - the brooms aren't going to help Slytherin as much as he thinks"

"Why?" Harry looked at her "They are top of the line, aren't they?"

"Oh yes - they are the best on the market, and Malfoy will have a huge advantage over everyone else"

"I sense a but coming"

"He is the only one who will" She smirked, then looked at them "Uncle Mike is teaching you critical thinking, Mr Potter, so why don't you and Minnie here work it out" She walked down the corridor, leaving Harry and Hermione staring at each other.

"You know she's a crazy girl, right?" Hermione asked.

"Oh yeah" He smiled "But she's MY crazy girl"

-----

"So - what are we going to do tonight?" Hermione asked.

"It's the feast tonight" Harry said, turning to face her.

"I meant after that" She smiled "I thought that with everyone having spooky fun, we could visit Myrtle and catch up on our lessons" She glanced across at Sally "Unless you two have plans?"

"A visit with Myrtle sounds like a swell idea" Harry blushed, but smiled when he saw Harry do the same.

"Then we are agreed. After the feast, we go visit Myrtle"

## Chapter 7

"So - can you explain this?"

Harry, Sally and Hermione were stood in Dumbledore's office. The Headmaster was sat behind his desk, while the four Heads Of Houses were stood behind them.

"Sir?"

"You were found in front of the writing on the wall, and right by Mrs Norris" Snape sneered at them "And you were missing after the feast"

"The three of us went for a walk" Hermione replied, then added "Sir"

"Why were you not in your common room?" Professor McGonagall asked.

"We didn't like the company" Harry said quietly "One too many red-heads"

"We can discuss that later" Dumbledore cut across the discussion "What did you see?"

(flashback)

The three of them had left the feast half an hour before, and - rather than go straight to the bathroom - had decided to wander around the school for a while.

"Do you really want to go back and deal with the crazy red-head?" Sally asked, and that had settled the matter.

So - half an hour later, they were walking towards the bathroom, when they noticed the floor was wet.

"Guys?"

"I know"

(end flashback)

"And that was when we saw the writing on the wall, sir" Hermione said "We didn't see the cat until the others turned up"

"Why should we believe you?" Snape walked round and faced them  
"Can you prove any of what you say?"

"Why would we want to hurt Mrs Norris?" Sally asked him, then turned to the rest of the teachers "And what is The Chamber Of Secrets?"

"It is a myth" Dumbledore replied quickly "A story that has been around for a century, and one that gets more and more elaborate with every re-telling"

"And The Heir?"

"Another part of the myth" McGonagall continued smoothly.

"So this story is just a myth? It's not in any way real?"

"Indeed"

"Then why are you all so worried about what happened?" Sally asked. For a moment there was absolute silence in the room.

"Well - thank you for coming" Dumbledore smiled "Professor McGonagall will escort you back to your common room"

-----

"Do you think they believed us?"

"Snape didn't"

"What else is new?"

-----

"Welcome to the first Quidditch match of the year" Lee Jordan's voice belted out across the pitch "And after the disaster last year, Gryffindor are back with their passions re-ignited. And after Slytherin lost the Cup for the first time in seven years, they are back with a new seeker, and seven new brooms"

There was a loud wave of assorted boos and cheers from around the stands, then he continued.

"So welcome on to the pitch Malfoy, Pucey, Jones, Simpson, Callum, Cannif and Flint, and Hagan, Bell, Johnson, Spinnet, Weasley, Weasley and Wood!" The noise level doubled as the players flew on to the pitch "And of course, Madam Hooch, our flying teacher and referee!" Another burst of cheers "And now - let the game begin"

-----

Half an hour later, Gryffindor were ahead by 80 points, and Sally had a smirk on her face. She had been watching her friends watch the game, and she knew they were on the verge of figuring out the problem that Slytherin was having.

Suddenly there was a shout, and she looked up, eyes widening in horror, to see a bludger heading straight towards them.

They ducked as it shot over their heads, then turned to see it slowing, then flying back towards them.

They heard various shouts of surprise and terror around them, but as the bludger shot past them a second time, they looked at each other, then all three of them drew their wands.

"Ready?"

"No"

"Lets do it!"

The bludger flew back at them, causing the kids around them to scream, but then Harry yelled "PROTEGO!" and a shimmer of gold appeared in front of them, causing the bludger to deflect off the shield and fly straight up in the air. A moment later, twin shouts of "REDUCTO!" echoed across the pitch, and everyone turned to stare at them as the ball exploded with a massive bang.

-----

"They have to replay the game!" Ron had been storming around the common room, yelling variations on the same theme, for nearly half an hour. Harry, Sally and Hermione were watching him from the corner.

-----

After they had blown up the bludger, they had realised that everyone was staring at them. But a moment later there was an exclamation of surprise and joy, and Malfoy flew up to Madam Hooch, and handed her the snitch.

The Slytherin team were celebrating, while The Gryffindors were crowding around Hooch, yelling that Malfoy had cheated.

After a few minutes, Hooch flew over to the staff box, and conferred with Snape, McGonagall and Dumbledore for a few minutes, then she flew back to the commentary box and spoke to Lee.

"Well - it seems that by a unanimous agreement, the game ends with a win for Slytherin, by 150 points to 80" The silver and green section of the stands erupted in cheers, but then Lee added "And the Headmaster would like to see Miss Perks, Miss Granger and Mr Potter in his office after tea"

-----

They looked up at Ron again. He had turned round, and was now glaring at them.

"It's your fault" He yelled "You distracted Hagan, and my brothers, so that Malfoy could win"

For a moment they stared at him in absolute silence, then burst out laughing.

"You think we fixed the game for Malfoy to win?" Harry said between laughs "Seriously?"

Before Ron could reply, Professor McGonagall came in to the room.

"Potter, Granger, Perks - you are to come with me to the Headmaster's office" She turned and stared at Ron "Mr Weasley - what is the matter with you?"

"He is just upset about the game, Professor" Sally smirked.

"Yes. Well - I am not entirely happy about it either, but rules are rules and Mr Malfoy did nothing wrong in catching the snitch when he did" She glanced at Harry and his friends "It was hardly his fault the Gryffindor team was distracted. Come along you three" She

walked towards the portrait. After a moment, the three students followed her.

-----

"I understand that young Mr Weasley is not happy about the result" Dumbledore said with a smile.

"Most of the house are unhappy, sir" Sally replied with a similar smile "Including your deputy"

"And what do you think of the outcome?"

"Most football players are taught to play to the whistle" Harry looked at Hermione, who nodded "While I know it was a bit of a distraction, if things had been reversed I am sure Slytherin would have accepted the result" He heard Sally snort in disbelief "Well - I hope they would"

"I am sure they would have" Dumbledore returned his smile "Now - would you care to explain why there was a distraction?"

"Well - it seemed that the bludger was intent on killing one, or all, of us. And the staff - including you, and Professor McGonagall, either hadn't noticed or had no idea what to do"

"Why didn't you try to get someone's attention?" McGonagall asked.

"There wasn't time"

"And the spell you used?"

"A shield to make it fly straight up in the air, and a blasting charm to destroy it" Sally turned to Harry "Your misspent youth paid off"

"Those spells are above second year level" Dumbledore gazed at them over his folded hands.

"We can read - the books in the library are clear enough" Hermione replied "Is that all, sir?"

"I think that we can excuse the destruction of school property, and the unauthorised use of magic, given the circumstances" Dumbledore smiled.



"That's very kind of you, Headmaster" Sally said in a neutral tone, then the three of them stood up to leave when Dumbledore spoke again.

"Harry, may I have a word with you, alone?"

"Of course, sir" He turned to Sally and Hermione "Do you want to wait outside?" They looked at each other, then nodded. He watched them leave, then turned back "How may I help you?"

"I was wondering how you are getting along this year?"

"I'm fine, thank you sir"

"Are there any ill effects from your encounter with Quirrell?"

"With Voldemort?" Harry said, but continued before Dumbledore could reply "Sally and I are both fine, sir"

"And you and she are... a couple?"

"Yes, sir, we are"

"And how long has this been going on?" Harry resisted the urge to say 'You mean you don't know already?', but instead he smiled.

"Since the holidays, sir. Is that all?"

"Just one more question" Dumbledore leaned back "What do you think of Professor Lockheart?"

"Why do you ask, sir?"

"Just curious"

"I think he is a phoney, and that, as unlikely as it sounds, he is far more dangerous to your students than last year's teacher" Dumbledore leaned forward, his eyes wide in surprise.

"Mr Potter - you shouldn't speak of a teacher like that" McGonagall said sharply. Harry turned to her.

"You want me to lie?"

"That wasn't what Professor McGonagall meant" Dumbledore sighed  
"But it is getting late, and I think you should rejoin your friends and return to your common room"

"Yes sir"

-----

"So you think he doesn't approve of us?" Sally asked as they walked back to the common room.

"He didn't say" Harry smiled "But no, he doesn't"

"Do you think he is going to do something about it?" Hermione asked.

"I have no..." Harry trailed off as he saw something at the end of the passage they were in.

"Oh my" Sally exclaimed "Colin"

-----

Half an hour later they were back in the Headmaster's office.

"We were walking back from your office, when we found Colin lying on the floor - petrified like Mrs Norris" Harry replied "So we got the attention of the portraits, and... well - you know the rest"

"And you don't know what might have caused this?" Snape asked.

"No sir" Hermione replied "By the time we found him, the corridor was empty - we didn't see anything that could have done this"

"Very well" Dumbledore said softly "I think you can return to Gryffindor Tower now, although I would prefer you were accompanied by Professor McGonagall"

-----

"Professor?" Hermione asked as the four of them went back to Gryffindor Tower.

"Yes, Miss Granger?"

"What is The Chamber Of Secrets?"

"I thought we had already explained that"

"You told us it was a myth" Sally replied "But you didn't tell us what the myth was"

"Didn't I? My apologies. But it is not a story for this time of night. Ask me again at a more suitable time"

"Thank you, Professor"

## Chapter 8

A few days later, Harry, Sally and Hermione walked in to the common room to see a large group gathered round the noticeboard.

"What do you think?" Sally asked.

"Not a clue" Harry moved over to the board, then came back with a smile on his face.

"What?"

"Lockheart is starting a dueling club" He replied, still smiling  
"Tomorrow night"

"Oh" Sally smirked "This should be fun" Hermione turned and stared at her "Oh yeah - the behave thing"

"I don't think we should draw attention to ourselves. Especially after Mrs Norris and Colin"

"Okay" Sally grumbled, then added "You never let me have any fun"

-----

"Welcome to the Dueling Association" Lockheart said in a bright voice "Given the recent events, the Headmaster thought it would be wise for you all to learn to defend yourselves"

Harry looked around the room, and had to admit it was a good turnout. There were students present from every year and every house, and there didn't seem to be any fights breaking out. He glanced across at Malfoy, but even he was watching Lockheart.

"My assistant tonight will be Professor Snape, but as we are here to teach you, we won't be dueling each other"

"And I bet he is glad about that" Sally said quietly, causing Harry and Hermione to giggle.

"Miss Perks - perhaps you would like to help us with a friendly duel?" She glanced at Harry, who smiled and kissed her cheek, then she walked forward and up on the dueling platform "And perhaps Mister Potter would care to join her?"

"I hardly think that Potter dueling his girlfriend will be an effective demonstration" Snape sneered "Maybe someone else would be a better choice" He looked around, then smiled "Miss Weasley - would you care to step up?"

Harry turned, not at all surprised by Snape's choice, and watched as Ginny smiled, and walked up to face Sally.

"Now - ladies - please remember that this is a friendly duel, and that you should limit yourselves to stunners, shields and disarmers" Lockheart looked at both of them "Are you ready?" They both nodded "Then, on the count of three" He took a few steps back "One. Two. Three"

"STUPEFY!"

"PROTEGO!"

"EXPELLIARMUS!!"

"PROTEGO!"

"STUPEFY!"

"PROTEGO" Sally watched as Ginny was forced to dive to her left "STUPEFY!" She yelled, and Ginny, still off-balance, had no chance to avoid it. As she slumped to the floor, Harry and Hermione burst in to applause, followed by a few of the other Gryffindors, although Harry couldn't fail to notice that Ron and his brothers were not amongst them.

"Well done, Miss Perks" Lockheart cried "A very impressive display"

"Indeed" Snape added "Given your stunning success, perhaps you would like to try your skills against someone your own age" He turned "Mr Malfoy" Harry looked up at Sally in alarm, but she simply smiled and nodded.

"Will she be okay?" Hermione asked him quietly.

"She'll be fine" He whispered back.

Malfoy swaggered up to the platform, stopping only to listen to a few words from Snape. When he was in position, Lockheart made the same speech as before, then stepped off to the side again. "One. Two..."

"STUPEFY!" Malfoy yelled, but Sally had been expecting it.

"PROTEGO!!" The spell rebounded, but Malfoy jumped out of the way.

"REDUCTO!!" Harry gasped, but Sally took one step to the left, and cast another shield spell. Lockheart took a step forward, to stop the duel, but Malfoy sent out a cutting curse.

"PROTEGO REFLEXUS!!" Sally shouted, and the spell bounced back at twice the speed, causing both Malfoy and Snape to throw themselves to the ground. Sally dropped the shield, then pointed her wand at her opponent. But before she could stun him, he yelled out another spell.

"SERPENSORTIA!"

A cobra shot out of the end of his wand, and landed in front of Sally. Harry and Hermione pushed forward, but the snake slithered forward, and Sally looked as if she was frozen in fear.

As the two of them reached the platform, the snake reared up, ready to strike.

Harry realised he would never be able to cast a spell in time, so he yelled out "STOP!" and was quite surprised when the snake turned to stare at him.

"You can speak?"

"Yes"

"I was ordered to attack this girl. Why do you stop me?"

"She has done nothing to you, and she means a lot to me. And the boy who summoned you is just using you to fight his battle"

"So I should attack him?" The snake asked. Harry smirked at the thought, then shook his head.

"No"

"Then I am finished. Will you set me free?"

"Yes" Harry pulled out his wand, and said "Finite Incantatum"

As the snake vanished, Harry looked up at Sally and was relieved to see she wasn't looking scared any more. But a moment later, she jumped down from the platform, took his arm and, with Hermione's help, pulled him out of the hall.

-----

A few minutes later, Sally pulled them in to an empty classroom.

"Are you alright?" Harry asked "Malfoy didn't hurt you?"

"No" She replied, still looking distracted "Though I can't say I am fond of snakes"

"I can't believe he did that!" Hermione said "And I am quite impressed that you stood up to him"

"Thank you" She turned to Harry "You're a parselmouth"

"Am I?"

"Did you call the snake off me?"

"Yes - you looked terrified, and I couldn't think of any other way to stop it"

"Harry - very few people can talk to snakes" Hermione said softly "It is a very, very rare talent"

"But I was speaking English" He exclaimed, then - at the looks he was getting - he added "Wasn't I?"

"All I heard was hissing" Hermione replied, looking at Sally. She nodded in agreement, and Harry's eyes widened in surprise.

"I spoke another language?"

"Yes" Sally looked over her shoulder, and frowned. A group of students were staring at them through the door. She slammed it, and turned back "There is something else" She walked back and sat down next to him "Being a parselmouth is considered to be the sign of a Dark Wizard"

"Really?" Harry asked.

"Voldemort can talk to snakes" Hermione started pacing back and forth "And, of course, Salazar Slytherin"

"So do you two..."

"No" They replied together, then Sally continued "There is also a legend that Merlin himself could talk to snakes"

"And besides - you aren't capable of being Dark, Harry" Hermione smiled.

"Well - thank you" Harry smiled back, then stood up "On the upside - maybe the red-headed Slytherin won't want anything to do with the big, bad parselmouth"

-----

"So - no punishment?"

"No"

"There's a surprise"

-----

The last class of the day was Transfiguration, and after the students had filed in and taken their seats, Hermione raised her hand.

"Miss Granger, traditionally students at least wait for the class to start before asking a question" There were a few laughs, and Hermione turned pink "What is it?"

"You said you would tell us about The Chamber Of Secrets"

"I suppose I did" She stood up from behind her desk, and walked round to the front of the class "As you know, Hogwarts was founded by four great wizards and witches of the period :- Godric Gryffindor, Salazar Slytherin, Helga Hufflepuff and Rowena Ravenclaw. They replaced the apprentice system, and unified and standardised magical education across the country. This worked for a number of years, but then two of the four founders had a falling out"

"Take a guess which two" Sally smirked.



"Quite" McGonagall smiled "Gryffindor was happy to accept everyone to the school, but Salazar Slytherin thought that the school should only be open to those who respected the traditions of magic, and who descended from wizarding lines"

"Purebloods?" Ron asked.

"Mostly, yes. But only up to a certain number of generations. Salazar was not a fanatic, but a pragmatist" She paused "But the two founders could not find a way to agree, and Slytherin left the school, threatening to return and ensure his vision was brought to pass. However, legend has it that he died a few years later"

"And The Chamber?" Hermione asked again.

"After Slytherin left the school, various papers were discovered that indicated he had created his own private chamber under the school. One where he planned the overthrow of the school, and that he left a creature there that would purify the school of those who were not worthy to attend"

"Creature?" Harry looked interested "What kind of creature?"

"No one knows" McGonagall said softly "But it is rumored to be a monster - one that only he can control"

-----

"So - what are your plans for Christmas?" Harry asked.

"Here" Hermione pushed open the door to a classroom.

"Here" Sally added as they all three walked in.

"Cool" The three of them sat down "So - what do you want to do tonight?"

"What was the shield spell you cast?" Hermione asked.

"It was in a..." Sally trailed off as a scream came from outside the classroom. The three of them looked at each other, then - wands drawn - they rushed outside and round the corner.

All three of them skidded to a halt at the scene in front of them.

Four students were stood, staring up the corridor, all with looks of surprise on their faces. The three of them looked past the students, and Harry's mouth fell open.

"What kind of monster can petrify a ghost?"

-----

"Mr Potter?"

"Yes, Professor McGonagall?"

"The Headmaster would like to see you in his office"

"Is this about Justin and Nick?"

"I believe so"

"Then wouldn't it be better to have Sally and Hermione come with us?" He asked.

"The Headmaster asked only for you"

"There's a surprise" Sally said under her breath. Harry leaned over and kissed her on the cheek.

"I'll be back soon" He said, then followed McGonagall out of the common room.

-----

A few minutes later, they arrived outside the gargoyles. McGonagall gave the password, then turned to Harry.

"The Headmaster wants to see you alone, Mr Potter" She said, then stood aside. He walked up the steps, and knocked on the door.

"Come in, Mr Potter" He pushed the door open, and walked into the office to find Dumbledore behind his desk "Good evening, Harry"

"Good evening, Headmaster"

"What can you tell me about this evening's events?"

"We were in an empty classroom, there was a scream outside, we rushed out and found a group of students staring at the petrified body of Justin, and the... well the floating and solid body of Nearly Hea... of Sir Nicholas"

"No idea of the cause?"

"No sir - we only saw the aftermath"

"And why were you in the classroom?"

"Pardon me?"

"Some of the teachers have professed surprise that you and your friends have been present at all the attacks. Someone with a less than charitable mind might think it is more than a coincidence" He stared at Harry intently, and Harry felt a tiny tickle at the back of his head. He checked that all of his occlumency shields were up, and then pulled up an image of McGonagall and Snape kissing passionately.

A moment later, Dumbledore sat back in his chair.

"Are you alright, sir?" Harry asked innocently.

"Yes, thank you" Dumbledore looked up at him "Would you like to tell me what you were doing in the classroom?" Harry paused for a moment, then shrugged.

"We didn't like the company in the common room, sir" He replied.

"Why not?" Dumbledore leaned forward again.

"Is there anyone in particular?"

"Not really sir, but I find it funny that given the number of lectures you gave me on House Unity in my first year, you seem somewhat unconcerned about it this year" Harry couldn't help smirking at the look of surprise on the Headmaster's face.

"Miss Weasley is in a difficult situation - we are just trying to make the transfer as easy as possible for her"

"Of course you are, sir" Harry nodded in apparent agreement "I understand"

"So you will stay in the common room from now on?"

"Probably not, sir. Miss Weasley is... obsessed with me, and the three of us are finding it very annoying"

"I would rather you stay in your common room, Harry - until we can find out who is behind these attacks, it would be safer for you three to stay there" Harry stared at him for a moment, then shrugged.

"If we are the ones responsible, as you suggested, why would be in any danger?" He stood up "May I leave?"

"Harry - why are you being so hostile? I only want what is best for you"

"Perhaps if you let me ask for your help, instead of deciding what is best for me and trying to force your help on me, I would be more willing to accept it" Harry replied softly "I can pick my own friends, my own family, sir" He paused "And I am also not fond of people who try to read my mind"

"You may return to your common room, Harry, but please keep in mind what I have said"

"I will if you will, sir"

## Chapter 9

"I am not imagining it, am I?"

"No"

"Haven't I asked you this before?"

"Yes"

"And I got the same answer, didn't I?"

"Yes"

"Okay"

"So - would you like to try the spell now?"

"Okay" There was a pause, then a voice yelled out "DERILAXUS"

A blue beam shot out of the end of the wand, bounced off the wall and struck the other person in the room.

"Wow" Hermione turned to Harry "That was pretty impressive"

"Thank you" He smirked "So, you think if we add a spell after that, we can bounce that spell off something?"

"I think so" Hermione said, then looked at her watch "We should get back - Sally will be waiting for us" She smirked "So will Ginny" Harry frowned "Sorry. But the Weasleys will be suspicious, and will tell Dumbledore"

"Okay, okay" He put his wand back in his pocket, then walked out of the classroom. They walked off in the direction of Gryffindor Tower, but then Harry stopped and looked around. Hermione walked on a few steps before she realised she was on her own.

"Harry? What is it?" He held up his hand, then span around.

"Find Girl. Kill Girl" He started to run, Hermione following behind him. He ran along the passage, then turned a corner "KILL. FEED. GIRL!" He looked down the passage he had entered, then he saw a girl at the far end. When he realised who it was, his heart jumped in to his mouth.

"SALLY!!" He yelled, causing his girlfriend to turn round.

"Harry?" She watched as her two friends came charging towards her  
"What's wrong?"

"Are you alright?" He skidded to a halt in front of her, then started looking around.

"I'm fine" She saw Hermione come to a stop beside her "Any idea what's wrong with him?"

"No idea" Hermione looked across at Harry, who was still glancing around, although now his wand was out and raised "We were coming out of the charms room when he just took off running. Then he saw you, and ran even faster" She looked at Harry, who had finally stopped looking around and was now staring at Sally with obvious relief "Harry?"

"I heard the voice again" He said, his voice wavering a little "It was coming after you" He saw the colour drain out of her face.

"Are you sure?" Hermione said, equally pale.

"It said 'kill girl' and was moving in your direction" He looked around again "You didn't see anything?"

"No" Sally looked around as well "Though I thought I saw someone - a person - walking toward the common room"

"Any idea who?" Hermione asked.

"Not a clue" She looked over at Harry "I'm fine, sweetie"

"I was just worried" He smiled back at her "Do you want to go and visit Myrtle? Maybe we can get some practice in"

"Okay" The three of them walked off down the passage, unaware they were being watched from the shadows.

-----

The three of them spent the next few days studying, and practicing in Myrtle's bathroom. They had all mastered the "Derilaxus" spell, with the ghostly girl's assistance, and were deciding what to move on to next.

They were also deciding whether or not to ask Dumbledore about inviting their respective families to the castle for Christmas Day.

"I know you don't want to play in to Dumbledore's hands" Sally said, as they walked down to the Great Hall "But he is the only one who can allow them to visit"

"Is that true?" Harry looked at Hermione "Couldn't McGonagall help?"

"Normally, yes, but I think she is in Dumbledore's pocket" Hermione frowned, then smirked "If one of us got hurt, they would have to let our parents visit" She watched as Sally and Harry looked at each other, then both shook their heads.

"What would happen if they just showed up?" Harry asked "Would Dumbledore kick them out?"

"He might, but there is the chance he won't want to annoy you" Sally smiled, but then her eyes widened as Harry frowned "What's wrong?"

"I don't want it to be like this" He stopped walking "I don't want to be at constant war with Dumbledore, with everything I do being scrutinized by him, or me having to blackmail him"

"But it's not your fault"

"I know. He's annoyed about Uncle Mike, and that I am mostly out of his control" Harry looked thoughtful "And I think he is annoyed that I am friendly with Minister Fudge as well"

"And don't forget me" Sally added with a smile.

"As if he could" Hermione replied, then ducked as Sally pretended to punch her "So - do we approach the Headmaster?"

-----

"Are you feeling alright?" Harry looked down at Ginny as he walked past the sofa.

"Like you care" Ginny mumbled under her breath.

"Pardon me?" He stopped and gazed down at her.

"You don't care if I am alright or not, so don't pretend you do" Harry looked at her for a moment, then shrugged and walked away. A moment later he stopped, then turned and walked back to the young girl and sat down next to her.

"Miss Weasley - May I talk to you?" She stared at him "Ginny - please"

"What do you want?"

"I would like to be friends" He said softly, looking at her "When we met on the Express, you seemed like an interesting, nice person" He saw her smile "And I know being away from your family, and from your brothers, isn't easy"

"How would you know?" She frowned "You have your friends around you all the time"

"But I was raised by my Uncle, and this is only my second year away from home" Harry smiled "I can't wait for the end of the term"

"I didn't know" Ginny smiled at him "What's your uncle like?"

"The nicest man I know" Harry replied "He rescued me from a bad situation, and he has protected me all my life from those who would use me, or do me harm" He looked up as Sally and Hermione came in to the common room "So - can we be friends?" Ginny smiled, but then saw Sally and Hermione and her smile faded. Harry followed her view, then turned back "And I'd like you to be friends with my friends as well"

"I'll think about it" The young girl replied, then stood up and with a last look at Harry, turned and walked away. Harry watched her go, then turned to his girlfriend.

"Hello"

"Hello" She glanced at Ginny's retreating form "Trying to make friends?"

"Uncle Mike suggested it might be a good way to stop her from doing anything else" He leaned his head on her shoulder "And to try to get her to accept us as a couple" She looked up at him "It's what Uncle Mike said"



"It does sound like him" She smiled "Do you think he will come to visit?"

"I think so. he has written to Dumbledore, and asked if the four of them can come after Christmas lunch" He noticed Ginny leaving the common room, then looked over at the collection of red-heads in the corner "What do you think they are up to?" He asked, then rolled his eyes "Need I ask?"

"They are getting more and more insistent every day" Sally frowned "And Ron seems to take a lot of pleasure in telling me what people are saying" She turned back to her boyfriend, and smiled "Want to have a little fun?"

"Always" He smiled "What did you want to do?"

-----

"You know it will just annoy them"

"Teach them not to tell stories"

"How do you think Ginny will react?"

"I am hoping she will find it funny"

-----

Myrtle floated down from the ceiling of the bathroom she occupied, and dived in to the bowl of one of the toilets. It had been ages since her friends had been to see her. But Harry had talked to her the previous night, and promised they would visit her later on that day.

Suddenly there was a noise above her, and, before she could fly out of her hiding place, she saw a black book shoot through her head.

"Who's there?" She asked, lifting herself up. She couldn't see anyone around, but the door to her bathroom was closing. She flew over to the door, and poked her head through it and looked around. She couldn't see anyone, and the passage was silent. She pulled back, and floated back to the toilet, and looked down in to the bowl.

"It's times like this" She said to herself "That I hate being dead" Then she heard a noise behind her and turned round to see Hermione, Harry and Sally.

"Are you alright, Myrtle?" Hermione asked "You seem distracted"

"Someone threw a book through my head and in to the toilet" She gestured to where she had been.

"Did you see who it was?" Harry asked, as Sally walked forward and, without hesitating, stuck her hand in to the bowl and fished out the book. She looked at it, then turned back to her friends.

"I am really glad this place hasn't been used for a while" She said with a wry smile. She held up the book "It's a diary of some type"

"Any idea who it belongs to?" Hermione asked.

"Someone named... T.M.Riddle" She flicked through the little black book "Whoever he was, he wasn't very good at making entries" She held it open "It's empty"

"So why would someone throw it away?" Harry asked, but Sally could only shrug "Do you want to keep it?"

"I guess" She looked at it, then cast a drying spell on it, and slipped it in to her robes.

"Myrtle?" Harry turned to the ghost "Are you sure you didn't see anyone?"

"Sorry sweetie" Myrtle replied, then giggled at the look on his face "I didn't see anyone. The person who threw it ran away very quickly"

"Oh well" Hermione sighed "I'm sure we will find out eventually" She looked at the other three "So - training?"

-----

"Mr Potter - the Headmaster would like to see you after tea" Professor Flitwick walked over to the Gryffindor table.

"Why?"

"I believe it relates to a letter from your guardian"

"Uncle Mike?"

"Yes"

"What about Sally and Hermione?" Harry asked.

"The Headmaster only asked for you" Flitwick walked away, and Harry turned to his friends.

"Why does he never want to see you?" he asked them with a smile  
"Have you upset the Headmaster and not told me?"

"He thinks he can isolate you from us" Sally looked thoughtful "Don't take this the wrong way, but I don't think that he thinks you are as bright as us, and that he can get a deal out of you that he wouldn't get if we were there"

"Oh" Harry looked dumbfounded, then turned to Hermione "Min?"

"I agree with Sally" She paused "And since he tried to read your mind, maybe he doesn't want us there because you might think he is doing the same to us"

"Ah" Harry sighed "Would you like to come with me anyway?" He smiled as their mouths fell open.

-----

"Ah, Harry" Dumbledore looked up, then frowned "And friends"

"I hope you don't mind, Headmaster, but I thought Sally and Hermione would like to hear this as well"

"May I ask why?"

"Uncle Mike told me that he would be writing to you about coming to visit, along with Susan, Claire and Arnold. So I thought they should hear your decision as well" Harry smiled at the look on Dumbledore's face.

"Well - I can't see any reason why not" The Headmaster replied.

"But..."

"What makes you think there is a but?"

"There is generally always a but" Sally replied. Dumbledore glanced at her, then turned back to Harry.

"Well - notwithstanding Miss Perks' opinion, you three have had a difficult first term, so I just wanted to give you a fun holiday, as you are not returning to your families" He smiled at them.

"Thank you" Harry said, then added "Do you have any news about the petrified students?"

"As you know, Professor Sprout is growing mandrakes, and she thinks they should be ready by Easter" Dumbledore sighed "She can't do it any sooner"

"And the creature that is doing this?" Sally asked.

"What makes you think there is a creature?" The Headmaster looked at her in surprise.

"It's that, or a student" Sally replied.

"Which isn't much better" Hermione added.

"Yes, well" Dumbledore paused "We haven't found out anything yet, but there haven't been any attacks recently, and we believe the danger has passed" The three students stared at him in surprise, but - after a brief hand signal from Sally - none of them said anything "Is that all?"

"Yes, sir" Sally said, before the others could reply.

-----

Five minutes later, they were in Myrtle's bathroom.

"Did he give in too easily?" Harry asked.

"Yes" Sally replied "He wants something from you. Or he will in the future"

"And now he thinks you owe him a favour - that we all do"

"Just because he thinks we owe him, doesn't mean we do" Hermione smiled in reply.

-----

"Happy Christmas!" Susan Perks walked in to the entrance hall, and hugged her daughter.

"Merry Christmas mum" Sally hugged her back, then smiled as her mother turned to Hermione and Harry and hugged both of them as well.

"How are you enjoying your second year?" She asked, as they sat down to wait for Harry's uncle and Hermione's parents.

"On the upside, there haven't been any trolls" Sally smiled "And I have managed to stay in the same house for a whole term!" Susan laughed.

"And the downside?" She asked when she had calmed down.

"Colin, Justin, Nick, Mrs Norris are all petrified, and everyone thinks that Harry is the one responsible" Sally smiled at her boyfriend "And, of course, the wacky adventures of the red-headed Slytherin"

"Miss Weasley is still on her Harry-hunting kick?"

"Yes" Sally smiled at Harry's frown when he said this "But, recently, she hasn't been talking or hunting at all"

"That's good?" Susan asked.

"Depends" Harry sighed "It's not that I miss her, or want her hanging around..."

"You are just worried that something has caused this change" Susan looked up as the three adults they were waiting for came in "Maybe we should talk about this later"

"MUM! DAD!!"

-----

She watched the reunion with a frown on her face. Getting rid of the diary had calmed her inner voices, but not silenced them completely. Tom had been so understanding, and given her a few ideas on how to get Harry away from his girlfriend, and even though she had parted company with him, the ideas were still there.

She was a member of one of the oldest families and was - as her mother had repeatedly told her - a most suitable consort for the heir to The House Of Potter. And whatever the Perks girl might think, Harry would not end up with such a low-born witch.

She knew Tom had helped her, and had given her the confidence to accept Harry's offer of friendship - as a stepping stone to the next level - but the diary had started to worry her. She knew she had a few gaps in her memory - more than a few if she was honest. There were long periods of time where she couldn't remember what she had done, and she was sure the diary had something to do with it.

But now the diary - and Tom - were gone for good, and she could - finally - set about winning Harry her own way.

As she watched the seven of them walk away, she smiled to herself.

"You will be mine"

## Chapter 10

The last day of the holidays brought two problems for the three friends.

The first was the return of the students - and with them the return of the glares, side-long looks and stares at Harry, and the quiet muttering about The Heir Of Slytherin. Ron and his brothers seemed to be a part of it, but to Harry's surprise, Ginny wasn't.

"You don't think it could be her, do you?" He asked Sally and Hermione "She's the first Weasley in Slytherin since - since ever, and..."

"And?"

"That's it" He shrugged "Never mind" They walked to the hall, and sat down at the end of the Gryffindor table.

-----

A few minutes later, Dumbledore and Lockheart came in to the hall, and walked to the front.

"Welcome back" Dumbledore said with a bright smile "I hope that all of you had a nice holiday, and you are ready to start a new term" He looked over at Lockheart, who continued.

"After the events of last term, Headmaster Dumbledore has given me permission to announce something that will cheer you all up" Harry glanced across at Sally and rolled his eyes "On Valentine's night, Hogwarts will be holding a dance" He paused as there were a few noises of surprise "But rather than a formal dance, instead we will be using a muggle idea called a disco" Harry and Hermione sat up straight, as did the other muggle-born students "For those of you who don't know what a disco is, I suggest you ask the muggle-born students in your house"

"And how will the Slytherins do that?" Sally whispered under her breath, causing Harry and Hermione to smirk.

"More details will be put up on notice-boards over the next few weeks" Dumbledore continued "And two weeks from today, a

number of clothing shops will have stalls in the Great Hall for anyone who believes they would like a new outfit for the dance"

-----

"So - do you want to go?"

"If you do"

"Well... I do if you do"

"Do you?"

Hermione watched her two friends talking as they walked back to Gryffindor Tower, and couldn't help smiling.

"I think the judges will take that as a yes" She interrupted them, causing both of them to turn and glare at her. She simply smiled back, and continued walking.

"Any idea about who you want to go with?" Sally asked her, as they reached the portrait hole.

"I haven't really thought about it" She replied, but the tinge of pink in her cheeks made her friends smirk "Okay - I have thought about it. But promise you won't tell anyone?"

"We promise"

"Well..." She glanced around, then - happy that they were alone - continued "Terry from Charms"

"Terry Boot?" Harry asked.

"Ravenclaw?" Sally added, then, when Hermione nodded, she continued "Are you going to ask him?"

"I don't know - the last time I asked a boy to a dance, it didn't go well" She turned "Did it, Harry?" Sally turned to her boyfriend as well, causing him to blush, and hide his face in his hands.

"Tell me more" Sally looked at them.

-----



"...and that's how we found out we liked each other better as friends" Harry finished, and Hermione nodded. Sally looked at them.

"That's so sweet" She smiled, then turned to Hermione "So - what are you going to wear?"

-----

"According to the notice-board, the second years get to go to the Great Hall at noon" Sally sat down next to Harry "Are you going?"

"I will come with you if you want" He looked up as Hermione came over and sat down on his other side "How did it go?"

"He said yes!"

"YAY!" He gave her a hug "So - Sally and I were talking about clothes" Hermione looked at him in surprise "Well - she was talking, and I was agreeing"

"So what did you agree?" She looked over at Sally "Dress or Robe?"

"I was thinking about a dress" Sally looked over at her boyfriend "Maybe one to match Harry's eyes"

"A green dress?" Hermione asked, then glared at Harry when he muttered something under his breath "Pardon?" He looked up sheepishly.

"I said 'But not a real green dress, that's cruel'" He said, causing Hermione to smack him on the arm, and Sally to ask him what he was talking about "I will explain it later. Have you found anything about the diary?"

"Not a lot, but we should probably talk about it in private" She looked around, then her smile faded as she saw Ginny walking over to them "And how I wish that were now"

"So - Harry - are you going to the dance?" Ginny asked, perching on the table in front of him.

"Yes"

"Are you going alone, or with someone?"

Harry glanced down at his left hand, which was intertwined with Sally's, then looked back up at Ginny.

"What about you?" He asked politely.

"No one" She sighed "There isn't anyone who is suitable, or even anyone who interests me" She smiled at him again, but he simply leaned over and rested his head on Sally's shoulder. Ginny frowned, then stood up and walked away. Harry watched her go, then turned to Sally.

"So - the diary?"

-----

"The diary seems to be a normal diary, kind of" Sally held up the book "It contains the memories of a sixteen year old boy named Tom Marvolo Riddle"

"But..."

"Well - look" She opened the diary, and picked up a pen and started writing 'Hello Tom'. A moment later, the ink faded, then the words 'Hello Sally' appeared.

"What?" Harry and Hermione stared at her in surprise.

"The book communicates by writing, and is able to talk to you"

"It really reacts to you?" Hermione asked "It would pass the Turing test?"

"I have no idea what that is, but from the look on your face, I am going to say yes - it would" Sally replied. She started to write again 'This is Harry and Hermione, friends of mine'

'Hello Harry and Hermione'

'Hello Tom. Can you tell us anything about yourself?' Hermione wrote.

'I am a student at Hogwarts, in my seventh year. Are you a student too?'

'We are all second years. What year is it?'

The questions went on for a little while, but "Tom" managed to deflect all of their questions, while finding out a lot about them. In the end, Sally closed the book.

"So - you see why I am so worried?"

"Tom Riddle was Head Boy in 1945" Hermione said "He was given a special award for services to the school in that year"

"How..." Harry started, then smiled "Hogwarts, A History?"

"You really should read it, you know" She smiled, then looked at the diary "So - what should we do with it?"

"I think we should put it away for now, and keep it a secret" Sally picked it up, and put it in to her trunk, then turned back "So - why would a real green dress be cruel?"

-----

The next few weeks passed quietly - there were no attacks, and Ginny seemed to back off from her quest to steal Harry away.

The evening before the dance, Dumbledore stood up after tea, and waited for the students to quieten down.

"As you know, tomorrow is the night of the dance, and there are a few changes to the normal routine. Following afternoon classes, all students will return to their dormitories, and get ready for the dance. There will be a buffet type meal during the dance, so you can eat then" He paused for a moment

"All students who are coming to the dance will be escorted down to the hall at seven o'clock, and any students who aren't are required to stay in their common rooms" He looked around "If anyone has any questions, please see your Head Of House"

-----

"Hermione - you know Professor McGonagall told us about The Chamber?" Sally sat down opposite her friend "Is it mentioned in Hogwarts, A History?"

"No - I checked" Hermione leaned over and pulled a book out "But, as they say, here's one I prepared earlier" She flicked through the

pages, then put it down "There is a story that it was last opened around fifty years ago. There were a few attacks - a seventh year girl died"

"Fifty years?" Sally looked thoughtful "When Riddle was in school?"

"All of it happened in 1945, so - yes"

"You think he knows... knew something about it?" They both looked over at Sally's trunk for a moment "Should we get Harry?"

-----

'What do you know about The Chamber Of Secrets?'

'It happened in my last year'

'Tell us everything'

'I can't tell you' There was a pause as the writing stopped, then it restarted 'But I can show you'

The three of them looked at each other, and they all nodded.

'Show us'

-----

There was a flash of light, and all three of them felt like they were falling.

-----

They landed a moment later, and found themselves in the entrance hall. It was dark, and they could only see a few people moving around.

"Is this the past?" Sally whispered, but then all three of them turned at the sound of someone coming down the main stairs. Hermione gasped, and put her hand to her mouth, as they saw two men carrying a stretcher between them, with a body covered by a blanket on it. Behind them came...

"Professor Dumbledore?" A voice called out from behind them, and a young man swept past them "Is it true?"

"Yes Tom, I am afraid it is" The two of them watched as the stretcher was carried out of the main doors "She was found an hour ago, in a bathroom"

"And will the school close?"

"That will be up to Headmaster Dippet, and The Board" Dumbledore sighed "But yes - the school will almost certainly be closed" Dumbledore turned and walked back up the stairs.

For a few moments Tom looked around, then he seemed to come to a decision. He turned on his heel, and strode off down the passage towards the dungeons. The three of them exchanged glances, then set off after him.

-----

Five minutes later they saw him come to a halt in front of a door. He pulled out his wand, took a breath, and pulled it open. The person in the room turned in surprise, and moved in front of a small crate.

"I'm sorry Rubeus, but this is the way it has to be"

"Tom?"

"They are talking about closing the school because of what you have done"

"Me? What 'ave I done?"

"Your monster has got loose. It's killed Miss Harker, and - unless someone stops it - it will kill more and Hogwarts will close"

"Aragog wouldn't 'arm anyone - 'e 'asn't done anythin'"

"The attacks must stop, Rubeus - the creature must die" Tom raised his wand. Hagrid turned and flicked the box open, and all five students watched in horrified fascination as a large spider-like creature skittered out of the box and away down the corridor.

Riddle threw a couple of spells after it, but they both missed, and the spider escaped. Tom turned back to Hagrid, and summoned his wand, then pointed them both at the student "You must pay for your crimes"

-----  
There was another flash of light, and they felt like they were falling again.

-----  
A moment later, they found themselves back in the empty classroom. They looked at each other, then at the diary.

"Hagrid?"

"The Heir Of Slytherin?"

"A spider?" Harry and Sally turned to stare at Hermione.

"Pardon?"

"Well - I've been thinking about it, and the creature from The Chamber has to be a snake of some type - it can't be a spider"

"Why?"

"Salazar Slytherin was historically great in many things, but what is the one thing that set him apart from the other Founders?"

"He tried to destroy the school?" Harry asked.

"He wanted to kill three quarters of the students?" Sally continued.

"He was a parselmouth" Hermione frowned at them "And the creature is one that only he can control" She looked at the other two "The creature has to be a snake of some type, so I don't think Hagrid was responsible" They sat in silence for a moment, then Hermione continued "So - should we tell anyone?"

"Maybe we could talk to Hagrid. See what he remembers about it?" Sally suggested.

"I take it neither of you want to talk to the Headmaster?" Harry smiled when they both shook their heads "Good" He looked at his watch "It's late"

"And we have classes, and a dance, to get to" Sally stood up "We should get back"

-----  
Later that afternoon, the three of them were walking back from Charms when Lavender Brown came running up to them.

"Sally - you have to come"

"What's wrong?"

"Just - come with me" She took Sally's hand and pulled her down the passage. Sally flashed a disturbed look at Harry, who set off after them.

-----  
When they arrived at the common room, Lavender and Sally set off up the stairs to the second floor. Harry started to follow them, but Lavender held up her hand.

"No boys allowed" She said abruptly, then turned and pulled Sally up the stairs.

-----  
"Any ideas?" Lavender looked around at the mess "Anything missing?"

"Not that I can tell" Sally rummaged around in her trunk, and realised that only one thing was missing "No - there's nothing missing"

"So... why?"

"Maybe I annoyed someone, or they didn't find what they wanted" Sally sighed "I will tidy up - can you tell Harry I'll be down in a few minutes?"

"Sure" Lavender walked out of the dorm room, and Sally leaned back against the bed.

"Why would someone want the diary?" She asked herself.  
-----

"Is everyone ready?" Professors McGonagall and Vector stood in the Gryffindor common room, waiting to escort the students to the dance "Then come on"

-----

The dance had been underway for an hour, and Harry and Sally were getting some food, when they heard a loud "CRACK" resound through the hall. They both turned to see Hermione glaring at Terry, and he was holding a hand to his cheek, with a look of surprise on his face.

"How DARE YOU!" She screamed, then - when she realised she had the attention of the entire hall, she flushed bright red, and turned and ran out of the doors.

Sally glanced at her boyfriend, then they both put their plates down, and followed her lead. Everyone watched them go, then the Great Hall was filled with the sound of furious whispering.

-----

As they were running down the corridor to catch up with Hermione, Harry's blood suddenly ran cold.

"GIRL. KILL. BLOOD. FLESH"

He took Sally's hand and started running faster.

-----

Hermione turned the corner to the grand staircase, then suddenly stopped. In front of her, she could see a body lying on the floor, a girl - probably a first or second year.

Suddenly she heard a noise behind her - a low, almost hypnotic hissing sound. She looked over to her left, and saw a tiny alcove. Closing her eyes, she ducked in to the space, and pushed herself as far back as she could.

She held her breath, but as the hissing got louder, she heard a voice calling out her name. She put her hand over her mouth to stop herself replying, but then breathed a sigh of relief as the hissing moved away, then vanished.



-----

"WHERE IS SHE?" Harry yelled, then his face lit up as he heard an answering call. He and Sally rushed over to the alcove, and pulled Hermione upright. For a moment he simply stared at her, then he engulfed her in a big hug, and was joined by Sally a few seconds later.

After a few minutes, Harry eased out of the hug, and then wiped away the tears running down Hermione's face.

"What happened?" He asked softly. Hermione took a deep breath, then lead them to the body she had seen only a few minutes earlier.

"After I left the dance, I was going back to my room, and I found her like this"

"Do you know who she is?" Harry asked.

"Luna Lovegood" Sally said softly "A first year Ravenclaw" She smiled sadly "Her father and my father were... friends"

"After I saw her, I heard a hissing noise behind me, so I hid until it went away" She turned to Harry "When it heard you - it went away" She hugged him again "Thank you"

"We should tell the Headmaster about Luna" Sally said, but Hermione touched her arm.

"Maybe someone else should do it" She looked over at Harry "I guess you noticed that I had a disagreement with Terry?" They both nodded "Well - he said something about you" She pointed to Harry "And us" She gestured to Sally "And - well it annoyed me"

"What did he say?" They both asked her.

"He said that you were the Heir, and that you had bewitched the pair of us in to following you" She blushed "And in to doing other things" Harry and Sally both frowned, and turned towards the hall "Don't! It will only make things worse"

"If you say so" Sally looked back at the still form of Luna Lovegood "We still have to tell someone"

"Then we go together" Harry took their hands, and then lead them back to the dance. As the three of them - still hand in hand - strode through the hall towards the Headmaster, everyone fell silent and watched their progress.

"Harry, Miss Granger, Miss Perks" Harry paused for a moment, wondering why he was the only one who merited a first name, then shook his head to clear it.

"Headmaster - we need you to come with us. There is something you should see"

## Chapter 11

Dumbledore dealt with them relatively quickly - Luna was taken to the hospital wing, the three of them told him what they had seen, and then they, along with the rest of the students, were sent back to the common rooms when the dance was called off.

The day after, they were all three called to the Headmaster's office to explain in more detail. They told their story, including the reason they had left the dance early, and what they had seen afterwards. Harry, after some prompting from Sally, mentioned the voice he had heard, and Dumbledore showed some slight interest, but made no other comment.

When they were finished, McGonagall took them down to breakfast.

-----

"Last night Miss Luna Lovegood was attacked, and is now in the hospital wing. Madame Pomfrey and Professor Sprout believe they can cure them, but our concern is now for the safety of the rest of you. Until we can find the attacker, whether human or otherwise, we are putting some security measures in to place" He paused for breath, looked down at the parchment in front of him

"There is now a seven o'clock curfew for all students, except prefects. Anyone caught breaking this will receive one month's detention. Prefects will now patrol with a member of staff, not just in pairs. During the day, all students will be escorted to class, and to meals" He looked around the hall

"We won't know when these restrictions will be lifted, and I want to stress they are only a precaution, and I am sure we can return to normal very soon" He sat down, and a subdued murmuring sprung up around the hall. Harry looked around, then leaned over to Sally and Hermione.

"So - how are we going to see Hagrid now?" He whispered.

"You still have your dad's cloak, don't you?" Sally smiled back, but Hermione frowned.

"We can't go sneaking around" She hissed, then - in a lighter tone  
"Why don't we send him a note, asking if we can have tea with him?"  
They both stared at her "What?"

"Why would we want to have tea with him?" Sally asked.

"Because we did it a lot last year, and it's been a while" She replied  
"And - if you ask me - I say we should tell him the truth about the diary. If he was at Hogwarts the last time The Chamber was opened, maybe he will know something" She pulled out a piece of parchment, wrote a quick note, then closed it and put it in an envelope "Who wants to take it?" they all looked up at the staff table, then smiled in surprise as Dumbledore got up and walked out of the hall. Once he had gone, Hermione took the letter to Hagrid. She didn't wait for a response, instead she walked back to her friends and sat down.

"So - do you think Gryffindor can recover against Ravenclaw on Saturday?" She asked conversationally.

-----

"Miss Granger - there is a note from Professor Hagrid for you" Professor McGonagall walked to the front of the class and handed Hermione a piece of parchment. She opened it, scanned it, and nodded.

-----

"He says he will meet us after the match on Saturday, so that we don't have to break curfew" Hermione told them as they were escorted to Charms.

"And you still think we should tell him the truth?" Sally asked.

"I think we should" Hermione nodded, then smirked at Harry  
"Because Harry isn't all that good at lying"

"You remember Aaron, don't you?" Sally asked, causing Hermione to blush and Harry to laugh.

"He is good at lying about important things" She saw Harry nod "But I don't think he could lie to Hagrid about thinking he is a killer"

"She's right" Harry hugged her "And I think we should tell him the truth as well" They both looked at Sally, who eventually nodded.

-----

"And Hagan catches the snitch, saving the blushes of the rest of the team as the game ends in a draw" Lee Jordan sighed, then continued "So, at the halfway point, Ravenclaw keep their lead in the Quidditch Cup, while Gryffindor stay in third place, and are now at the mercy of the Hufflepuff/Slytherin match next week"

"Well - it could have been worse" Harry said as the stands emptied.

"The keeper let in fifteen goals and none of our chasers made a single shot even close to being on target" Sally replied "And - to be honest - if the Ravenclaw seeker had been any slower, she would have fallen off her broom. Hagan could have flown to Hogsmeade and back in the time she had"

"Twice" Hermione added, then looked up as someone sat down next to them "Hello Hagrid"

"Ello everyone. You ready to come up for tea?"

"Yup" Harry replied, standing up and taking Sally's hand.

They walked across to Hagrid's hut, and went inside. Hagrid poured them all a drink, then Sally looked across at Harry, who nodded. She turned back to Hagrid.

"We asked to visit you, because we wanted to ask you about The Chamber Of Secrets"

"The Chamber... why would I know 'bout that?" He asked, looking confused.

"We have seen... a memory" Hermione said in a kindly manner "From a diary belonging to a former student" She paused, watching the look on Hagrid's face "Tom Riddle" The reaction was worth seeing. His eyes went wide, and he dropped his cup, then he made to stand up "We know that he was the one who got you expelled, and that you had a pet spider which was supposed to be the creature in The Chamber, and we can guess you were expelled for being The Heir of Slytherin"

"Ow..."

"We just wanted to ask you what you know about the monster, and about what happened fifty years ago" Harry said, then added "We never thought you were The Heir, or that you were responsible, and if we can find out who was responsible before, then maybe we can catch who is doing it now" Hagrid stared at them for a moment, then smiled.

"You're a good boy, 'Arry. Your parents'd be proud of ya" He looked at the two girls "And you two - thank ya as well" He paused, and wiped his eyes "'Is name was Aragog, an' 'e was an acromantula I was rasin'. 'E didn't 'urt anyone, let alone little Myrtle"

"We saw him run away. Could he still be in the school?"

"'E lives in t'forest with 'is mate, an' 'is family" Hagrid replied "I could..." He stopped as there was a loud knock at the door. He stood up, and opened the door "'Ello 'EadMaster, Minister" He stood aside and let the two men in. Dumbledore stopped short when he saw the three students, but Fudge strode over and shook Harry's hand.

"Good to see you Mister Potter" He smiled "And of course, your friends" He shook their hands, then added "Though I hear that Miss Perks is more than just a friend"

"So is Hermione!" Sally said quickly, causing both Harry and Hermione to stare at her "Oh... that's not what I meant"

"I quite understand, Miss Perks" Fudge smiled, then turned to Hermione "I meant no offence, of course"

"None taken, Minister" Hermione smiled back "Would you like to join us? I am sure Hagrid wouldn't mind?" She looked up at him, and Hagrid nodded.

"Alas" Dumbledore said "We are here on serious business..."

"The attacks?" Hermione asked, and resisted the urge to smile when the eyes of all three adults widened "We were just talking about them, and we thought Hagrid might know something about them since he was wrongly blamed the last time" If the silence that had

greeted her first statement was loud, the one that greeted this was deafening.

"How did you know about that?" Dumbledore asked after a moment.

"We found a diary belonging to a former student. He was the one who 'revealed' Hagrid as The Heir, because the student didn't want the school to close" Sally looked at Hagrid "And Hagrid confirmed the details"

"But how do you know they are telling the truth?" Fudge asked with no hint of an accusation.

"The diary described a spider, and just before you arrived Hagrid told us that it was an acromantula that lives in the forest" Harry said, then turned as Hermione interrupted him.

"Who" She said. When everyone stared at her, she smiled sheepishly "Acromantulas are sentient beings, and have specific genders, so you would refer to him as 'who', not 'that'"

"Oh. Sorry" Harry smiled back.

"So could we meet... does he have a name?" Fudge asked Hagrid.

"Aragog, but 'e isn't fond o' visitors, an I think there's trouble with 'is family"

"Why?"

"Aven't ya noticed? All the spiders are leavin' the caste, an' going back to 'im" Hermione gasped as Hagrid said this, but when everyone looked at her, she simply shook her head.

"Never mind" She said. Dumbledore watched her for a moment, then turned back to Harry.

"Would we be able to see this diary you mentioned?"

"It was stolen, sir, on the night of the dance" Sally replied "But we can show you - and Minister Fudge - a pensieve image of what we saw"

"Saw?" Fudge exclaimed.

"The diary acted like a pensieve, Minister, and showed us Tom confronting Hagrid, after Professor Dumbledore, as he was then, told him the school would be closed because of the death of Myrtle Harker. It also showed us a younger version of Aragog" She looked up at Hagrid, but continued talking to Fudge "In the memory, Hagrid was surprised and genuinely shocked to be accused. If you watch it, you will see he is truly appalled by the very notion that he was even suspected" She looked back at Fudge "He isn't to blame now, and he wasn't then" The hut was silent for a moment, then Fudge sat down.

"Very well. I admit I originally came here to arrest Hagrid, but if you will show me the memory of what happened, I will hold off the Wizengamot for a while" He looked over at Hagrid "I promise I will try, at least"

"Thank ya, Minister"

"Now - about this memory?"

-----

Fifteen minutes later, Dumbledore, Fudge and Hagrid leaned back from the pensieve, all looking thoughtful.

"So - are you convinced, Minister?" Harry asked.

"Yes" Fudge smiled "I will report back to the Wizengamot that we are looking for someone else, and that Hagrid isn't connected to this" He stood up "If you will excuse me?" He walked out of the office, and, as he closed the door behind him, Harry turned to Dumbledore.

"What can you tell me about Tom Riddle, Headmaster?"

"Why do you ask?"

"He knew something - he was willing to turn Hagrid in, and get him expelled, for something he didn't do" Harry paused "I am guessing he was a Slytherin"

"That 'e was" Hagrid said "An' one of the worse"

"What happened to him?" Sally asked "Did he survive the first war?"



"He was given a special award for services to the school - although it would appear now it was undeserved, and he graduated as Head Boy. He attempted to become the defence teacher, but The Governors considered him to be too young, and was turned down" Dumbledore paused "After he left the school for the last time, I lost track of him. I believe he was seduced, and then destroyed, by Voldemort" Harry's eyes widened at the expression, and he glanced at Hermione, who shrugged.

"Thank you sir" Sally said, wondering about the reactions of her friends.

"I wonder if I might talk to Harry for a moment?" The Headmaster asked "Hagrid can escort you back to Gryffindor Tower, and I will bring Harry back when we are finished" Sally looked across at Harry, but, after he made a quick gesture, she nodded.

"See you later then" She said, kissing him on the cheek, then she followed Hagrid and Hermione out of the office. Harry watched them go, then turned back to the Headmaster.

"How may I be of service to you, sir?"

"You appear to be very friendly with Minister Fudge, Harry"

"Sir?"

"The incident with the dragon last year, and now this" Dumbledore looked intently at him "I wonder if you have considered the consequences"

"My Uncle told me that Hagrid rescued me from the ruin of my parents' house, and that he saved me from going to my mother's sister" Harry smiled "I guess I feel I owe him a debt" He paused "Hagrid, not The Minister, obviously"

"But Cornelius is not the type to do favours without expecting some type of repayment. I fear you might be getting too involved with him, and will regret it in the future"

"My Uncle believes that Minister Fudge is a good man, and that I can trust him, at least for the moment" Harry smiled as something occurred to him "I know I have asked him for two favours, and that I

owe him, but The Minister" He said with emphasis "Is not the type to take advantage of me"

"I just thought I should caution you to be wary"

"Of course sir" Harry paused "Is that all?"

"Yes. I will take you back to the common room now"

-----

(AN - Can I just say how much I hate writing for Hagrid?)

## Chapter 12

Despite the fact Hermione was desperate to get to the library, the staff were unwilling to let any students out on their own. She had to wait nearly a month before she could confirm what was at the back of her mind.

"Something about spiders" She said, one morning at breakfast "I know I have heard... something about it before"

"I am sure you will work it out" Harry smiled.

Sally had also demanded an explanation about the suspicions they had about what Dumbledore had told them about Tom Riddle.

"So - you think that he is lying, because of a film you saw when you were ten?" Sally asked them. When they both nodded, she continued "But Dumbledore probably hasn't seen this film, has he"

"You know" Harry said, glancing at Hermione "When you put it like that, you make us sound crazy"

"It was the way he phrased it" Hermione sighed, then she looked at Harry, who nodded in agreement.

"If you ask the Headmaster what happened to my parents, he would say they were killed. And the Death Eaters who died in the war - he would say they made wrong choices and paid the ultimate price"

"And because he said 'seduced and destroyed', you think there is something else going on?" Sally looked at them, and they both nodded "And, just so as we are clear, you both know you are mental, right?" They both nodded again, although they were smiling as they did.

The Quidditch match between Hufflepuff and Slytherin ended in a resounding victory for Hufflepuff. However, the utter humiliation of the Slytherins, and Malfoy, was slightly muted by the fact Gryffindor were banished to fourth place, trailing Hufflepuff by one hundred points.

"Three hundred points!" Ron had spent a lot of time moaning, although it was only half-hearted - with a number of Gryffindors still in the hospital wing, the entire house was in a subdued mood.

"But there are two more matches" Ginny said "We could..."

"We?" Sally asked, but before anyone could reply, she continued "Besides - Ravenclaw are going to win the cup, unless Slytherin beat them, then they win instead. Gryffindor and Hufflepuff are out of it, although " She glanced at Ginny, and emphasised the next word "WE can take second if WE win by more than 120 points" Everyone stared at her in surprise, although Ginny's look had more than a little loathing in it.

"For someone who doesn't like Quidditch, you seem to know a lot" Ron sneered.

"My mother taught me how to count, Ronald" Sally replied, then turned back to Harry and Hermione "I have an idea"

-----

"So - you still think this is a good idea?" Hermione asked, as she, Harry and Sally crept along under the invisibility cloak.

"If I had to spend one more day listening to you moan about not going to the library, I would have asked to have been resorted again"

"I could've gone on my own"

"The last time you went out alone, you were almost attacked" Harry said firmly.

"Okay, Okay" She sighed "Are we nearly there yet?"

-----

Ron waited until he was sure they wouldn't see him, then he followed the three down the hallway. He knew they had been vanishing a lot during the year, but this was the first time they had been out since Luna was attacked.

If he could catch them, or arrange for them to be caught, he could finally get that Perks girl expelled, and then his mother, and his sister, would stop badgering him about Harry.

He heard them round the corner to the grand stairway, and ran up to where they had been stood.

"The library?" He whispered to himself "Why are they sneaking out to the library?"

-----

She watched them from her hideyhole with a slight smirk. Once they reached the library, she would find a way to distract her prince, and then her pet could get rid of those meddling bitches forever.

She opened her mouth to call her pet, but closed it when she heard someone else come down the corridor.

-----

"AHA!" Hermione yelled, albeit quietly. The other two turned to look at her "The basilisk is known as The King Of Serpents, and is one of the most deadly of creatures. Its gaze can kill, and its bite is poisonous. Spiders flee before it, but it can die at the cockerel's call" She waved the book "That's what's in The Chamber"

"Sorry?" Harry asked, but Hermione waved him to be quiet.

"I will explain when we get back to the common room" She turned to Sally "Any information?"

"Maybe" She held up a book "I will take this - return it tomorrow"

"Okay" They stood up, and all got back under the cloak.

-----

Ten minutes later they were walking back along the passage to the main stairway when they saw the body.

-----

"Miss Granger, Miss Perks, Mr Potter - what are you doing out of bed?"

"Professor McGonagall - you have to come with us"

"May I ask why?"

"There's been another attack" Harry said "Ron Weasley"

-----  
"So - Harry - would you care to explain yourself this time?"  
Dumbledore stood in front of the three students, along with  
McGonagall.

"We went to the library to look up a few things, and on our way back  
we found Ron petrified on the floor" Sally replied "I know we can not  
prove it, but we had nothing to do with it"

"Why did you feel the need to go to the library just before midnight?"  
The Headmaster asked.

"Because we were unable to get there before then" Hermione  
replied calmly.

"Did you find what you needed to find?" Dumbledore asked, but  
before they could answer, there was a knock at the door, which was  
then thrust open to reveal Cornelius Fudge, Amelia Bones and  
Lucius Malfoy.

"Professor Dumbledore, may we have a word with you?" Fudge  
asked.

"Of course, Minister" The Headmaster turned to Professor  
McGonagall "Could you escort our three students back to Gryffindor  
Tower" He turned his gaze to Harry "We will talk about this  
tomorrow"

-----  
They arrived back at the Tower, and McGonagall bade them  
goodnight, then left back the way they had come.

"So - what were you going to tell us?" Sally asked.

"Have you heard any cockerels this year?" Hermione asked, and  
they both shook their heads "I think that whoever the Heir is, they  
killed all the cockerels, and is able to control the creature"

"Parseltounge?" Harry asked.

"Yes. If the Heir is the true Heir of Slytherin, it makes sense he, or  
she, would be able to speak to snakes" She smiled at Harry's

reaction "But that doesn't mean its you because you can speak to snakes"

"Could it be Voldemort?" Sally asked "I mean - he got in to the school last year. Why not this year?"

"I suppose it's possible" Harry said thoughtfully, then looked at Sally "Did you find out anything about Tom?"

"He left the year Grindlewald was killed, and after that he had one or two jobs - after being turned down for the defence job. And then..."

"He vanished?"

"Yeah. There is no record of him after 1960 - it's as if he simply disappeared from the face of the earth"

"Could he have been killed in the war?" Hermione asked.

"A lot were - there are estimates of two, three hundred who were never found" Sally sighed, then shook her head "The only new member of staff is Lockheart, and he doesn't strike me as being possessed"

"A useless wazzock, but not possessed" Harry said with a laugh, then he looked over at the clock "We should to go bed"

"Okay" Sally and Hermione stood up, and walked off up the stairs. Harry sat for a moment, then his face lit up, and, with a smile, he bounded up the stairs to bed.

-----

"After a meeting with members of The Ministry and The Board Of Governors, it has been decided that, unless the culprit can be caught, we will be forced to close the school"

Dumbledore surveyed the Great Hall, and sighed. The meeting had been very lively, and had brought up unpleasant memories of a similar meeting fifty years before.

"The school would only be closed for as long as the danger exists, but it could be for some time. The Minister has given us two weeks, and after that letters will be sent to your parents, telling them the situation. If anyone wishes to be withdrawn now, there will be no

problem with you returning in the future" He looked over at Harry, Sally and Hermione at the far end of the Gryffindor table "Finally - may I remind all of you that the rules we put in place are for your safety, and that violating them puts the future of the school in jeopardy, as well as your own lives"

-----

Harry listened to the Headmaster, then turned to his friends.

"Do you think he is talking about us?" He asked with a smile.

"It's possible" Hermione replied "But given that we are less than two weeks from the school being closed, why are you so happy?"

"Last night I remembered something - and it might be the answer we need" He leaned forward "Do you remember the name of the girl who was killed?"

"Myrtle Harker"

"And where she died?"

"In a bathroom" There was a pause, then Hermione's eyes went wide "Myrtle?"

"If it is her, then maybe she knows more about this than anyone else" Harry said, looking around "I think we should go and talk to her as soon as we can"

"Okay" Sally nodded "How soon?"

"I'd say three or four days at least" Hermione looked up at the staff table "If they catch us again, then I am pretty sure they will kick us out"

"Okay" Harry looked up to see Dumbledore coming down the hall towards them "I guess it's time for Round Two"

"Harry - I was wondering if you, Miss Perks and Miss Granger have a moment to continue our discussion from last night?"

-----



The three students sat in Dumbledore's office, waiting for the Headmaster. Suddenly there was a voice from above them.

"Greetings" The Sorting Hat said "Why are you three loitering here?"

"We have been asked to tell the Headmaster about what we know about The Chamber"

"And what do you know?" The Hat asked. When they didn't reply, it continued "If you are worried, I don't serve the Headmaster, I serve The Founders and Hogwarts. I will keep anything you tell me to myself" He looked at Harry "Surely you can't doubt that, Aaron?" Harry gasped in surprise, then smiled.

"Okay - here is what we know, and what we think" He spent the next ten minutes telling The Sorting Hat about The Chamber, the creature, Tom Riddle and the other events of the year. When he had finished, he asked "What can you tell us about Tom Riddle?"

"Nothing more than you already know" The Hat gave a small sigh "One of the spells that gave me life made sure that, whatever I see during a sorting stays private, unless the person lets me tell"

"And if you told us about Tom, then you could tell Dumbledore about us" Sally said, then continued "Can you tell us anything about Voldemort?"

"What would you like to know?"

"Was he a student here?" Sally asked.

"Yes"

"Do you know anything that would help us?"

"He has no regard for anyone's life, except his own, and will sacrifice anyone to serve his own purpose, and kill anyone who won't" The Hat looked down at them "Don't underestimate him, or he will utterly destroy you" There was silence for a moment, then the door opened and Dumbledore came in.

"Sorry for keeping you waiting" He said, sitting down behind his desk "Now - why did you go to the library?" The three students looked at each other, then back to the Headmaster.

"We just wanted to find out more about The Chamber, sir" Hermione said "We realised the school might be closed, and we thought we could help" Dumbledore looked at them, then felt a slight tickle at the back of his head. Strengthening his shields, he turned slightly and looked at Sally.

"Did you know that the use of legilimency on children is a criminal offence?" He said in a light voice. Almost at once, the feeling vanished.

"You have nothing else to add?" Dumbledore asked, his tone far less friendly than it had been.

"No sir" Hermione replied.

"Then please wait here for someone to take you to your first class" He stood up and stalked out of the office.

"Good choice" The Hat said from above them.

"Thank you"

"One more thing"

"Yes?"

"Whatever you are planning, do it tonight"

"Why?"

"Because if you don't, then by tomorrow there won't be a single person left alive in the school"

-----

The classes seemed to go on forever, but eventually they returned to the Gryffindor common room.

"When we are escorted down for tea, we should hide in an alcove, then use the cloak to go to Myrtle's bathroom" He looked at his two best friends "You don't have to do this"

"For love, for friendship" Sally replied with a smile "For what is right"

"You can't get rid of us that easily" Hermione added.

-----  
As Lockheart escorted them down to the Great Hall, Harry threw the cloak over his friends, and the three of them walked slowly away from the rest of the group.

Less than five minutes later, they arrived at Myrtle's bathroom.

"Myrtle? Are you here?" Sally called out. For a moment there was no response, then the ghostly girl flew down from the ceiling.

"I didn't think I would see any of you again" She said "But I am glad you came"

"Myrtle" Harry stood in front of her "Is your last name Harker?"

"Yes"

"How did you die?" As he asked this question, Myrtle's face fell.

"I don't want to talk about it"

"Please?" He asked "We think your death is linked to the attacks now, and if we catch who is doing it now, we might find the person who killed you" When Myrtle didn't answer, Harry dropped to his knees. A moment later, Sally and Hermione followed suit "We need your help" He said. She looked at them, then giggled.

"Oh get up - do you know how silly you look?" She smirked, but a moment later, her face became serious "I came here after a fight with a girl in my dorm. She was teasing me about having a crush on the Head Boy. About a minute after I came in, I heard someone else come in. I peaked out of my cubicle, but I couldn't see who it was" She paused, then took a deep breath "I heard a strange sound - a hissing noise - then a sound of stone scraping on stone, and then..." She stopped.

"A pair of yellow eyes" Hermione asked quietly. Myrtle nodded mutely.

"Thank you" Sally said. She saw Harry walk over to the basins on the far side of the room, and then heard him hiss at them.

"That's it!" Myrtle exclaimed "That's what I heard!"

"Parseltounge" Hermione explained "The sound you heard is someone speaking to a snake..." She trailed off as she saw the basins open up, to reveal a slide that lead down - into the foundations of the castle. Harry looked over at them.

"I think this is the way in to The Chamber" He said softly "Myrtle - would you like to come?"

"Why?"

"Maybe find out who did all this?" Sally asked. Myrtle thought about it, then shook her head. "Okay then. We will see you later"

## Chapter 13

A few minutes later, they were walking through an underground tunnel, heading towards where they thought The Chamber should be. Halfway along they found a snake skin.

"That has to be the largest snake I have ever seen" Harry muttered, then noticed Hermione frowning "Min?"

"Snakes generally shed their skin in the first few years of life, and then they grow bigger"

"How much bigger?"

"Normal snakes?" He nodded at her question "Two, three times"

"And magical snakes?"

"I have no idea"

They continued along the passage, and arrived at a large door, engraved with a number of snakes. Harry shrugged, then commanded it to open. It slid aside, then they walked in to The Chamber Of Secrets.

-----

Myrtle watched as a figure in a Hogwarts uniform walked over to the basins, hissed at them, then disappeared down the passage.

"Oh dear"

-----

"Albus" Professor McGonagall ran up to the staff table "You should come with me"

-----

Five minutes later, they arrived on the third floor, and Albus looked up.

"HER SKELETON WILL LIE IN THE CHAMBER FOREVER"

"Return all students to their common rooms, and find out who is missing" He said in a firm voice "And... and contact Ameila and ask her to send any Aurors she can spare. We need to search the castle"

-----

Harry watched Hermione, and let out a small laugh.

"What's so funny?" Sally asked, walking over to him.

"Just look at her" Harry pointed to where Hermione was leaning over one of the pillars "She's like a kid in a candy store"

"Aren't you the least bit excited? This is The Chamber, built by one of The Founders themselves! Doesn't it make you wonder?"

"I am more worried about the giant snake that wants to eat us" He replied, glancing around. Suddenly there was a noise from behind them, and the door to The Chamber started to slide open. Hermione turned, then all three of them ducked in to an alcove, and watched as a young girl entered The Chamber.

-----

"Who is missing?" Dumbledore asked.

"Miss Weasley" Professor Snape replied "She didn't come back to the dungeon after tea. Minerva also informs me she isn't in Gryffindor Tower"

"So we will have to inform..." He trailed off, because his deputy had her hand in their air "Minerva?"

"Three of my students are also missing"

"Who?" He asked, then sighed "I suppose they aren't in any of the other three common rooms?" When there was no reply, he sighed again "Do you think they went willingly, or were taken?"

"Can you imagine anyone forcing them to do anything against their will?" McGonagall replied "I think they heard about... the writing on the wall, and went to deal with it"

"Very well" Dumbledore stood up straight "Lock down the castle - no one gets in or out without my permission. We shall just have to wait for them to return" He paused "Or for the Aurors to find their bodies"

-----

"Ginny?" Sally whispered "The Heir?"

"She can't be" Hermione whispered back "The Weasley line goes back to the time of The Founders, and it has always been on the side of light"

"But she speaks parseltounge" Harry replied "And she is here, in The Chamber"

"We could say the same about you" Sally said with a smirk, but then all three of them went quiet as Ginny collapsed. Harry made to go to her, but Sally held him back "Wait"

Nothing happened for a few minutes, then a ghostly figure rose up from the floor, then became a solid figure.

"You can come out now" The figure said "I know you are there" Harry waved his hand to the girls, and walked out in to the light.

"Who are you?" He asked.

"Where are the other two? Miss Perks and Miss Granger?"

"They are probably in bed, asleep" Harry replied "Or waiting to yell at me for doing this"

"You would never come here alone, Mr Potter. Tell them to come out, or I will kill the girl"

"Leave her alone!" Sally yelled, as she and Hermione walked up behind Harry.

"So much concern for her" The figure looked down at the prone form of Ginny "Do you know that she hates you?"

"Why?"

"Why do you think?" The figure looked across at Harry "She poured her heart out to me about how her prince - her knight in shining

armour - was being seduced and deceived by a low-born, common witch" He laughed "The hate she displayed amazed even me, and as you will learn - that takes some doing"

"Who are you?" Harry asked "And what do you know about us?"

"You know who I am" The figure gestured at a small black book, lying on the floor where it had fallen out of Ginny's robes.

"Tom Riddle?"

"Amongst other names" Tom said "And I know you - The Great Harry Potter. The Boy Who Lived. The boy who vanquished the greatest and most powerful wizard of the century. How is it that a baby could do such a thing?"

"Harry? You vanquished Dumbledore?" Sally asked with a smile.

"Voldemort was long after your time" Hermione said, looking at the ghostly image of Tom "What do you know about him?"

"Voldemort was my past, my present and my future" Tom pulled out Ginny's wand and held it up. A moment later the words "TOM MARVOLO RIDDLE" appeared in the air

"The name my filthy muggle father gave me. But when I learned of my true nature - my heritage and my destiny - I rejected his name, just as I rejected that part of my history" He waved the wand, and the letters re-arranged themselves to read "I AM LORD VOLDEMORT" He turned back

"I was already using the name here, at Hogwarts, but after that stupid bint died, and the school risked closure, I had to find someone else to blame" He laughed "As if that great oaf could be The Heir Of Slytherin"

"Dumbledore knew" Sally said "He didn't think it was Hagrid"

"No, but it never stopped your beloved Headmaster from expelling him" Riddle smirked "Nor did it stop him covering up my other indiscretions"

"No... he wouldn't..." Hermione shook her head.



"I thought you knew better than that - Ginny told me that you have no lover for Dumbledore. He knew all along what I was doing, and what my plans were, and I think it suited his purposes to let me do what I wanted"

"Why?" Harry asked.

"So he could stop you later" Sally said, frowning at the images in her head.

"There is hope for you yet, Miss Perks" Tom smiled "If it wasn't for the fact you will be dead soon, I could find use for you in my plans" He turned and stared at the end of The Chamber, where the face of Salazar Slytherin filled the entire wall. Sally heard him hiss, and looked at Harry.

"Come to me, come and purify the school" He said, then they fell silent as the mouth of the statue began to open "Both of you - close your eyes, and be prepared to attack" He looked around, but Hermione pulled his arm to the left.

"Behind here" She signaled, and all three of them ducked back in to the alcove they had been hiding in when Ginny entered "Harry - you have to translate. Sally and I will try to kill it"

"Aren't basilisks impervious to magic?" Sally asked, as the sound of hissing got louder.

"I think if we can get it to open its mouth, we can hurt it" Hermione said "Only its hide is protected" She paused "Oh - and we HAVE to destroy its eyes" She turned as Riddle called again.

"Come to me, your lawful master" Harry translated, then they all reared back in shock as the giant snake came slithering out of the mouth of the statue. He looked over at Sally.

"First - we all go for the eyes - reducto, banishing, summoning - anything you can think of to destroy them. Once they are gone, Richard - wait for Miranda and I to get its mouth open, then hit it with everything you've got"

"Okay" Hermione and Harry replied together, then a moment later, all three of them pulled their wands out.

"REDUCTO!"  
"VELARIA!"  
"INCENDIO!!"

There was a massive bellow from the basilisk, and Harry smiled.

"I think we did it" He opened his eyes to squint at the snake. It had stopped advancing, and there was a massive amount of blood running from its eye sockets "It's blind"

"But it can still bite or crush us" Sally called out "Or swallow us whole" She looked around "Mir - by Ginny. Richard - front and center. I am going by Tommy boy" They ran out of the alcove, then split up. A moment later, the two girls opened fire on the creature with a barrage of different spells. Harry's hand twitched as he fought the urge to join in. He knew he could hurt the monster, but if he was firing on the hide, he might miss the chance to fire at its mouth.

"KILL THEM!!!" Riddle yelled in parseltounge "KILL THEM NOW!!!"

"Richard!" Sally yelled "Can you tell it something else?"

"You don't have to hurt us" He looked up at the basilisk, but it continued to weave about, sometimes dipping its head towards the girls. He switched back to English "It's no use"

"Okay" She paused "Get ready" She signaled Hermione, and they both moved their focus to a point on the front of the snake's torso. Harry took a step back as the head came towards him, then smiled as it reared backwards and opened its mouth wide.

"REDUCTO!                      REDUCTO!                      REDUCTO!!!"  
"REDUCTO!!!"  
"REDUCTO!!!"

As Sally and Hermione joined in, Harry cast another blasting curse, then they all cheered as the snake collapsed in a heap, with a huge hole in the back of its head. They watched for a moment, wands still raised, in case it wasn't dead, but - when it didn't move - they all turned back to Tom.

"Your monster is dead, Tom" Harry said "And you are next"

"You are too late - her life force is almost gone, and very soon I will be whole again"

"INCENDIO!" Sally yelled, aiming at the diary. Then she gasped in amazement as the flames simply fizzled out. She turned back to Harry, and shrugged apologetically. Harry looked over at the diary, then back at Tom.

"You failed to kill me as a child. You failed to kill me last year" He said firmly "This year will be no different"

He summoned the diary, then he spun round, and impaled it on one of the fangs protruding from the basilisk's mouth.

Tom screamed, and a hole appeared in his chest. Harry pulled the diary off, then stabbed it again. More holes appeared in the image of the former Head Boy, and his screaming got more intense. Harry pulled the diary back, then turned to Tom.

"Any last words?"

"Dumbledore - he has no regard for individual lives, and will sacrifice anyone to serve his own purpose" Riddle sneered at them "But he, and I, are the least of your worries. You will be attacked from within, you will never see it coming, and it will utterly destroy you"

"Thank you, but I am sure we will cope" He spun round, and raised the diary.

"You will wish you had died" The image of Riddle said, then it vanished as Harry stabbed it again. Harry sighed, then pulled the diary free again. He looked at Sally, and smiled. Then they both turned as a moan came from the other side of The Chamber.

"Where... where am I?" Ginny asked, then she caught sight of the people around her "Harry?"

"Yes, Ginny" He walked over and sat down next to her "What's the last thing you remember?"

"The Headmaster told us the school was going to close, and... we were heading back to the common room. And then... then I was here"

"Well - it is a long story, but we should talk about it later" Harry looked over at his friends "They will know we are missing, and Ginny's parents will be worried" He stood up and held out his hand. She looked up at him, smiled, and let him pull her to her feet.

"Did I do it?" Ginny asked quietly.

"Yes" Sally said softly "But it wasn't your fault"

## Chapter 14

The three of them led Ginny back to the slide they had entered by.

"Harry - any ideas?" Sally asked, looking at the near vertical slope. Harry looked up, and could just about see the torchlight from the bathroom above. He shrugged, then whispered "Stairs" in parseltounge.

Ginny started, staring at Harry in fear, but she didn't say anything.

There was a flash of light, then the slide started to change. After a minute or so, a set of stone steps appeared.

"Do any of you need to rest?" He asked "The slide was pretty long" The three girls shook their heads, so Harry drew his wand, and started up the stairs. Hermione took Ginny's hand, and followed Harry. Then Sally, also with her wand drawn, brought up the rear.

-----

"There's no sign of them Albus" Professor McGonagall sighed "The Aurors found nothing, and the staff say they haven't returned to any of the common rooms"

"Then ask them to search again" Dumbledore said sharply. He then looked around the office "Does anyone know where Gilderoy is?"

-----

The four students walked along the passage towards the Headmaster's office. Hermione was still holding Ginny's hand, as the young girl looked absolutely terrified about what was going to happen when they reached their destination.

"My word! Mr Potter and friends" Lockheart came up from behind them "Did you know the Headmaster has the entire Auror force out looking for you?"

"No, sir. Why?"

"Miss Weasley is presumed dead - taken by The Heir of Slytherin in to The Chamber. And you three are either suspected as The Heir, or as insanely brave Gryffindors doing something heroically stupid" He

looked down at them, then smiled "But either way, it won't matter for long"

"Why not, sir?" Sally asked. She glanced at Harry, and moved her hand to signal 'Be wary'

"Because when you are found by the Aurors, you three will have lost your minds at the sight of the monster, and Miss Weasley will only remember that I rescued her and slew the best" He snapped up his wand, but before he could get another word out, three wands were pointed back at him.

"STUPEFY!"

"EXPELLIARMUS!!"

"PETRIFICUS TOTALUS!"

Lockheart flew backwards, and landed in a heap on the floor. Ginny stared at them in shock.

"Sally - can you bring him along?"

"Really? We can't just leave him here? Or - you know - lock him in The Chamber?" Harry smirked at the image, then shook his head.

"I think that the Headmaster would like to know that his Defence Teacher tried to attack us" He smiled again "And I would like to see his face when we tell him"

"And I think the world would like to know that he likes to take credit for other people's work" Hermione added. Sally sighed, then levitated Lockheart's body, and the four of them started working to Dumbledore's office again.

-----

"Mrs Weasley - Molly. Please sit down"

"Thank you, Headmaster"

"I am afraid we still don't know where your daughter is, even though we have searched the castle from top to bottom"

"And Harry?"

"I am here, Mrs Weasley"

Everyone in the room turned, and Molly let out a gasp.

"GINNY!!"

-----

Half an hour later, after Ginny and Lockheart had been taken to the hospital wing, Dumbledore sat opposite Harry, Sally and Hermione. The four heads of House stood behind them, along with Arthur Weasley and Amelia Bones.

"Have our parents been called?" Sally asked.

"They have been notified, and will be along shortly" Dumbledore smiled "Now - would you like to tell us what happened?"

"We were in a disused bathroom, and we... we found the entrance to The Chamber" Harry said.

"Why didn't you tell anyone?" Snape asked.

"We had only just found it when..." He looked over at Arthur "When Ginny came in"

"Ginny?" Arthur asked. Sally held up the diary.

"She was possessed by this" Sally passed it to Dumbledore "It contains the memories of Voldemort, and I think.. I think it is alive in some way"

"Really?" Professor Flitwick stood up, and walked over to her "May I?" She handed it to him, and he sat back down.

"You were saying?" Dumbledore indicated Sally should continue.

"I think the memory of Voldemort in the diary possessed her, and that he started acting through her"

"She killed the cockerels" Hermione continued "She summoned the basilisk - that was what the creature was - and she wrote on the walls"

"My Ginny..." Arthur's face was filled with shock "She couldn't have... she wouldn't..."

"I don't think she did, sir" Harry said kindly "Voldemort took her over completely - she had no choice, and she wasn't herself"

"You said the creature was a basilisk. How do you know?" Professor Sprout asked.

"When Ginny came in to The Chamber, she collapsed, and a ghost appeared" Hermione saw the look on Arthur's face "It wasn't her - it was of Voldemort at the age of sixteen" She turned to stare at Dumbledore "When he was a student at Hogwarts named Tom Riddle" There was a moment of silence, but when it became apparent Dumbledore wasn't going to reply, Sally picked up the story.

"He was using her life force to become corporeal - I think he planned to join his present self and continue his plan. But we were in his way - so he summoned the basilisk to kill us" She smirked "It didn't exactly go to plan"

"You killed it?" McGonagall exclaimed in surprise "How?"

"Hermione and I hit it with spell after spell until it opened its mouth to scream, and then..."

"Then the three of us blew its bloody head off" Harry said with a big smile. He turned to Flitwick "And - by the way - the stories about the basilisk fang being deadly to all life are true" He pointed at the diary "The hole through the diary should be proof enough"

"And where does Professor Lockhart feature in this exciting tale of Gryffindor courage?" Snape asked "And how did he end up in his... current state?"

"We were bringing Ginny here when he found us" Sally replied "He told us he was going to make it look like we had lost our minds, and that he had rescued Ginny. And then he pointed his wand at us" She turned to Dumbledore "All three of us are sorry for attacking a teacher, but we didn't feel we had much of a choice"

"And I don't think it was the first time he has done this sort of thing, sir" Hermione added "I think you should check in to his history"

"I will doubtless do that, once he has recovered from his injuries" Dumbledore frowned "If he recovers from his injuries" Then he



smiled again "If there are no more questions, I think there are a number of Gryffindors who would like to speak with you"

-----

When they arrived back at Gryffindor Tower, it was to find almost the entire house waiting up for them, along with a few other visitors.

"Mum!"

"Uncle Mike!"

"Dad! Mum!"

After a few minutes, and various hugs and kisses had been exchanged, the three students and their families walked over to one of the sofas and sat down. Almost at once they were surrounded by the rest of the house, as well as five of the six Weasley brothers.

"Is she okay?"

"What happened?"

"Where are mum and dad?"

Sirius stood up and fired a cannon-blast spell in to the air, causing the room to fall in to silence.

"If you will be quiet, my nephew and nieces should be able to tell you what you want to know" He saw Sally and Hermione look at him in surprise, as did Claire, Arnold and Susan "Honourary of course" They smiled, then Harry turned back to the Weasleys.

"Professor Dumbledore will, no doubt, tell you all about it tomorrow, but Ginny was taken down to The Chamber by Voldemort" He paused as a ripple of fear went through the room "We were down there, and we rescued her from being killed by the creature"

"How is she?" Percy asked.

"She is recovering in the hospital wing" Sally said "Your parents are with her, but your dad said he would be along in a little while"

"Who was The Heir?" One of the twins asked.

"Voldemort" Hermione said, causing another ripple of fear "But I think that the Headmaster can explain this better than I can" She looked around the room "There is nothing to worry about - Volde.. of FOR GOD'S SAKE!" She jumped to her feet "It is just a name! He has been gone for eleven years and you are still scared of his name? What kind of Gryffindors are you?"

"Calm down, darling" Arnold hugged her, and she blushed at her outburst.

"Sorry" She sat down next to Sally "He's gone, and I am sure he won't be back in the school any time soon"

"Any other questions?" Sally looked around the room, but no one responded. She looked over at her mother.

"If you will all excuse us, our children have had a long day" She stood up, and the seven of them went up to Harry's room. Once they were inside, Sirius turned, and cast a series of locking, silencing and privacy charms on the door, fireplace and windows.

"So - what happened that you don't think Dumbeldore wants everyone to know?"

"Do you remember the diary?" Sally asked.

"Riddle's?"

"Well - it turns out it was... more than a diary. It contained a spell that trapped part of his essence, and that let him possess Ginny"

"Oh my" Sirius gasped "But you said she was taken down by..."

"Yeah" Hermione grimaced "The Headmaster told us that Tom was... how did he phrase it?"

"Seduced and Destroyed" Harry and Sally said together.

"Seduced and Destroyed by Voldemort" Hermione continued "But now it seems that they are one and the same" She looked around "Why didn't he tell us the truth?" She saw her mother smirk "I know what you are thinking, mum, but it is still a lie, whatever Obi-Wan may think"

"Is this a Darth Vader thing?" Sirius asked, and smiled when Hermione nodded.

"And who, or what, is Darth Vader?" Susan asked "Another dark wizard?"

"A character from a muggle film" Harry said with a smile "If you come over for the holiday, we will let you watch it" Susan nodded, then looked at Hermione "There was something else?"

"Ginny was responsible for all the attacks - although it was Voldemort directing them" She looked at Sally "I don't know about the ones on us though - do you think she had some part in those?"

"From what Tom said, she did" Sally replied "But I wouldn't call him a trustworthy source"

"I think you should give her the benefit of the doubt, for now at least" Sirius looked at Harry, who nodded in agreement and turned to Susan "I do have a funny story, if you would like to hear it?"

"Really?"

"Oh yes" He told her about the encounter with Lockheart, and how it ended. The four adults stared at him, then all started laughing.

"So - he isn't going to be teaching any more?"

"Probably not" Sally smirked.

"He won't try to get you in trouble for attacking him?" Claire asked.

"I think he will be too busy saving his own reputation" Susan replied "And threatening four kids won't exactly help his cause" She realised the kids were looking serious again "Sally?"

"There is something else we have to tell you, but... we would prefer to show you, because you probably won't believe us otherwise"

"Is this about the creature?" Arnold asked.

"Partly, yes" Hermione looked at Harry and Sally, then back at her parents "It was a basilisk - a giant snake"

"How giant?" Sirius asked.

"Sixty feet"

"Bloody hell"

"Well said" Harry smirked.

"And you fought it?" Susan asked "What were you thinking?"

"We didn't have a choice" Harry said softly "Ginny would have died, Riddle would have become corporeal, and the basilisk would have been released on the rest of the school" He took Sally's and Hermione's hands "We did what we had to" The adults stared at them for a moment, then Susan looked at Hermione.

"You said it was only partly to do with that?"

"The image of Riddle said some disturbing things" Hermione said "But again - you would be better seeing it than hearing it second hand" There was a moment of silence, then Sirius nodded.

"When we get home, we are going to want to see it" He said firmly "I think all of us should know everything that is going on, don't you?" Before anyone could reply, there was a knock on the door "Is there anything else?"

"There was something else" Sally said hesitantly "Dumbledore... Dumbledore has attempted to use legilimency on Harry at least twice, and.. well mum and the Grangers wouldn't be able to stop him" She looked up at Sirius "I just thought you should know"

"He did WHAT?" Sirius yelled.

"He didn't get anything" Harry replied, but there was another knock "And he knows that we know, and that we would tell you, so I don't think he will do it again" He stood up "We should open the door" Sirius paused, then muttering about Dumbledore and where the Headmaster should stick his wand, he canceled all the spells and opened the door.

"Mr Whiteheart" Professor McGonagall stood in the doorway "Mr and Mrs Weasley were wondering if they might have a word with Mr Potter"

## Chapter 15

"Harry - thank you for coming" Arthur Weasley indicated he should sit down next to Ginny's bed "We just wanted to thank you for what you did for Ginny"

"Well - it wasn't just me, sir. Sally and Hermione were part of it too"

"But I am sure you did the most, and saved my daughter" Molly said "Just like you parents" She looked fondly down at the girl in the bed "We were wondering if you would like to consider visiting us over the summer? As a way of getting to know the family better?" Harry had a feeling the invitation wasn't going to be extended to Sally or Hermione, which annoyed him, but he didn't want to be impolite.

"Thank you, but I will have to talk to my Uncle first"

"Don't you think he will let you come?" Molly asked doubtfully "Albus said that your uncle was a very controlling person" Harry's expression soured.

"Mrs Weasley..."

"Molly"

"Mrs Weasley - although I might not share Professor Dumbeldore's views on how I am kept safe, I do see the need for some protection, especially after the past two years"

"So?"

"Since my parents died, Uncle Mike has kept me safe, and never once led me wrong. So before I can agree to go anywhere other than where I live, I am going to ask him" He paused, then smiled "But I will ask him, and let you know what he says"

"Do you think he would consider letting some of our children visit you?"

"Again, I would have to ask" He looked down at Ginny "May I be honest about something?"

"About Ginny?"

"Yes"

"Okay"

"I am glad she is alright, and if we had to save her again, we would"  
He smiled softly "But I don't want to be her boyfriend"

"What makes you..."

"I am just saying" He turned and walked towards the door. When he reached it, he turned round "I hope she gets well soon" then he opened the door, and walked out, leaving Molly and Arthur staring after him.

-----

The next morning at breakfast, Dumbledore told the school what had happened, although Harry, Sally and Hermione noticed a lot of facts had been left out.

"Hopefully, school will return to normal over the next few weeks, and the year will conclude as it should. Professor Sprout and Madame Pomfrey believe the mandrakes will be ready by the end of this week, and the petrified students will be cured" This was greeted by a number of cheers.

"However, I have to announce that Professor Lockhart has decided to resign his post as Defence Against The Dark Arts teacher, and will be seeking employment elsewhere" This was met by stunned silence, although Dumbledore was sure he heard snorts of amusement from the far end of the Gryffindor table.

"For the time being, it will be taught by a Ministry Auror, and I am happy to announce that Professor Remus Lupin will take over the position at the start of next year" He looked around, and noticed that Harry was staring at him in what appeared to be shock.

"Finally I am happy to say that the last two matches in The Quidditch Cup will take place over a single weekend, six weeks from now" He was unsurprised at the huge cheers that followed that announcement "So - enjoy your breakfast"

Sally turned to her boyfriend.

"Professor Lupin?"

"I will explain later" He said quietly, and Sally nodded.

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The last two months of school passed in relative quiet. A week after Ginny had been rescued, her brother and the other students were cured by Madame Pomfrey. They were given a brief explanation of what had happened while they were sleeping, and told, in no uncertain terms, not to bother the four students involved in the story.

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The Quidditch Cup went to Ravenclaw after they demolished Slytherin in the next to last game. The 300 points they won by let Gryffindor finish in second place the day after, when they scraped a victory over Hufflepuff by a single goal. It was their first victory in a long while, and, after the humiliation of the previous year, most Gryffindors seemed pretty happy about finishing in second place, even though it was by nearly 600 points.

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The exams came and went, and the three of them passed with flying colours, with the top marks in the year for defence.

"But after killing a basilisk, it would come as no surprise to me" Dumbledore told them "It almost seems like you have been getting extra education"

"Well - we were not going to get one from Lockheart, were we" Harry replied.

"So it would seem" Dumbledore looked at each of them "May I ask what your plans are for the summer?"

"Spend time with each other, maybe go on a few days out" Harry looked up "Why?"

"I understand that the Weasleys have invited you to visit The Burrow?"

"Yes, sir"

"Do you intend..."

"Why do you want to know?" Sally asked "Harry isn't your responsibility when he isn't in school, and you don't seem to be worried about Hermione's plans or mine"

"As Harry, and his Uncle, are fond of telling me - security is important, and if you are to visit The Burrow, I was going to ensure that the wards were checked and, if necessary, upgraded"

"Well - that is kind of you sir" Harry smiled "But until I talk to my uncle about it, I don't know if I can go" He paused, then added "And the invitation was just for me"

"Pardon me?"

"I don't think the Weasleys want Sally, or Hermione, around" Harry frowned "If their daughter is anything to go by, anyway"

"I am sure you just misunderstood them" Dumbledore smiled "Now - I know you are anxious to pack, but I just have one more question, if I may?" Harry nodded "When I mentioned Mr Lupin, you seemed to know who I was talking about"

"He was at school with my mum and dad, and, along with Black and Pettigrew, they were almost inseparable" Harry wondered what the Headmaster was getting at. But when Dumbledore glanced at the two girls, Harry finally understood.

"And that was all your father told your guardian?" Dumbledore asked.

"Yes sir" Harry replied calmly "What else would there be to tell?"

"Oh - nothing, nothing" He breathed a visible sigh of relief "I believe that is all, unless you have any questions?"

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"So - you are going to tell us eventually, aren't you?" Sally asked as they walked away from Dumbledore's office.

"Later" He looked around "It is something Dumbledore wants to keep secret, and, for once, I agree with him"

"Okay" Sally nodded "But you had better tell us"



"On the train" He smiled "I promise"

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"So - we reach the end of another year" Dumbeldore surveyed the Great Hall "And despite the problems, the year had ended well. Our students, and Mrs Norris, are back with us, and, thanks to the actions of three of our students, a danger to the school has been removed, and will never return" He smiled again "After their stunning performance in their last match, both The Quidditch and House Cups go to Ravenclaw. However..."

"Oh you have got to be kidding me" Hermione moaned.

"...along with the cups, which I will present to Ravenclaw in a moment, I have four awards to give out as well" He walked round to the front of the staff table, and picked up an envelope "Fifty years ago, one of our students was unjustly punished for crimes that were not his doing. After the events of this past year, The Minister has issued a formal apology, and a license for a new wand, and permission to once again use magic, to Professor Rubeus Hagrid"

The hall erupted in to cheers as Hagrid came forward, and took the envelope. He returned to his seat, wiping his eyes, and Dumbledore turned back to the table, and picked up three more medals

"The same set of events fifty years ago lead to another student receiving a special award for services to the school. I am sorry to say we were mistaken in granting it to him, but - after the heroic rescue of another student, and the removal of a major threat to the wizarding world, I am happy and proud to present Special Awards for Outstanding Services to The School to Sally-Ann Perks, Hermione Granger and Harry Potter"

The three students looked at each other, then Sally nodded, and the three of them rose, and turned to the front of the hall.

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"Lock the door, and silence the compartment" Harry said as they sat down on the train. Sally looked at him questioningly, but Hermione pulled out her wand and cast various charms. When she was finished, both girls turned back to him "This is one of those things you can't tell anyone" He looked at them "Except maybe your

parents, but I would like to tell them myself, if you think it is necessary" They both nodded "Remus Lupin was a very good friend of my father's, and of my mother's"

"You said they met in school?"

"The four of them - Sirius, Remus, Peter and my father - were known as The Marauders. They were all the best of friends through school, and in to adult life. And because they were friends, Sirius, Peter and Jame noticed that Remus seemed to be ill a lot"

"What was wrong?"

"He usually spent one night a month in seclusion, and was tired for most of the day before, and the day after" He paused "And, after a few months, it became apparent that the night he spent in seclusion was always the same night" He looked at Hermione "The night of the full moon"

"He's a werewolf?" Hermione asked after a moment.

"Yes" Harry sighed "But, according to Uncle Mike, he is a good man who has been given a sad lot in life" He watched her, and smiled as she nodded "You know I never force either of you to do anything against your will, but if this got out..."

"We understand" Sally said softly "And we promise neither of us will say anything about it" She leaned over and kissed him gently "And we will wait to tell our own parents until you and Uncle Mike say it is okay"

"Thank you" He smiled, but his smile faded as he saw the two people waiting outside the compartment door "Oh joy" He canceled the spells, opened the door, then sat back down as Ron and Ginny came in. As they sat down opposite him, he took Sally's hand in his.

"Harry - I just wanted to say thank you again" Ginny said "For saving me, and for keeping... well for not telling the entire story"

"You weren't responsible, Miss Weasley, and after this year I wouldn't want anyone to be the topic of rumours"

"Have you decided if you are coming to visit yet?" Ron asked.

"I still need to talk to my Uncle" He paused, then squeezed Sally's hand "I meant to ask - was the invitation for just me, or are Sally and Hermione welcome too?" Ginny looked over at Ron, who shrugged. She turned back.

"I will ask my mother"

"Thank you" The five of them fell in to silence, which lasted for a few minutes, then Sally stood up and reached for her trunk "Would you like to play a game?"

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Just before the train arrived at King's Cross, the compartment door opened, and Luna Lovegood stuck her head in.

"Harry, Sally, Hermione - I forgot to say thank you for trying to help me. I know you all risked your lives, and that Hermione nearly died, and I wanted you all to know I am in your debts" She left before anyone could say anything, but after she had gone, Ron smirked.

"Ron?"

"Luna is... a little strange" He smirked again "Ever since her mother died, she has been known as being odd"

"She seems nice" Sally said.

"She is" Ginny replied with a smile "But still - she is a little odd"

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Five minutes later, the Express pulled in to the station, and the students started to disembark. The three of them walked along the station, Harry still hand in hand with Sally, to where their parents were watching. Harry kissed Sally goodbye, then watched as she and her mother drove away. Then he turned back to where Sirius and the Grangers were waiting.

"Tell me Harry - do you plan to make every year at school as interesting as this one?" Sirius smirked.

"That depends" Harry smiled "How do you feel about Remus Lupin teaching Defence next year?" Sirius stopped dead, and turned to stare at his godson.

"I think that would qualify" He smiled "Come on - lets go home"

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"We need him back"

"Even though he might be a traitor?"

"Yes"

"And this is the only way?"

"It will divert attention - they will assume they know who the target is, and move to protect him at all costs"

"Could we not take him as well?"

"No. Our Lord wants him left alone - he will deal with the brat himself"

"When am I to... begin?"

"Let it be on his thirteenth birthday"

"Thy will be done" He gave a bow, and turned away. His master watched him leave, and then smiled. If the plan worked, and there was little doubt that it would, this year would see the return of the betrayer to the fold, and with him the best chance to return their Lord and Master to his rightful position.

And then - well then the fun would really begin.